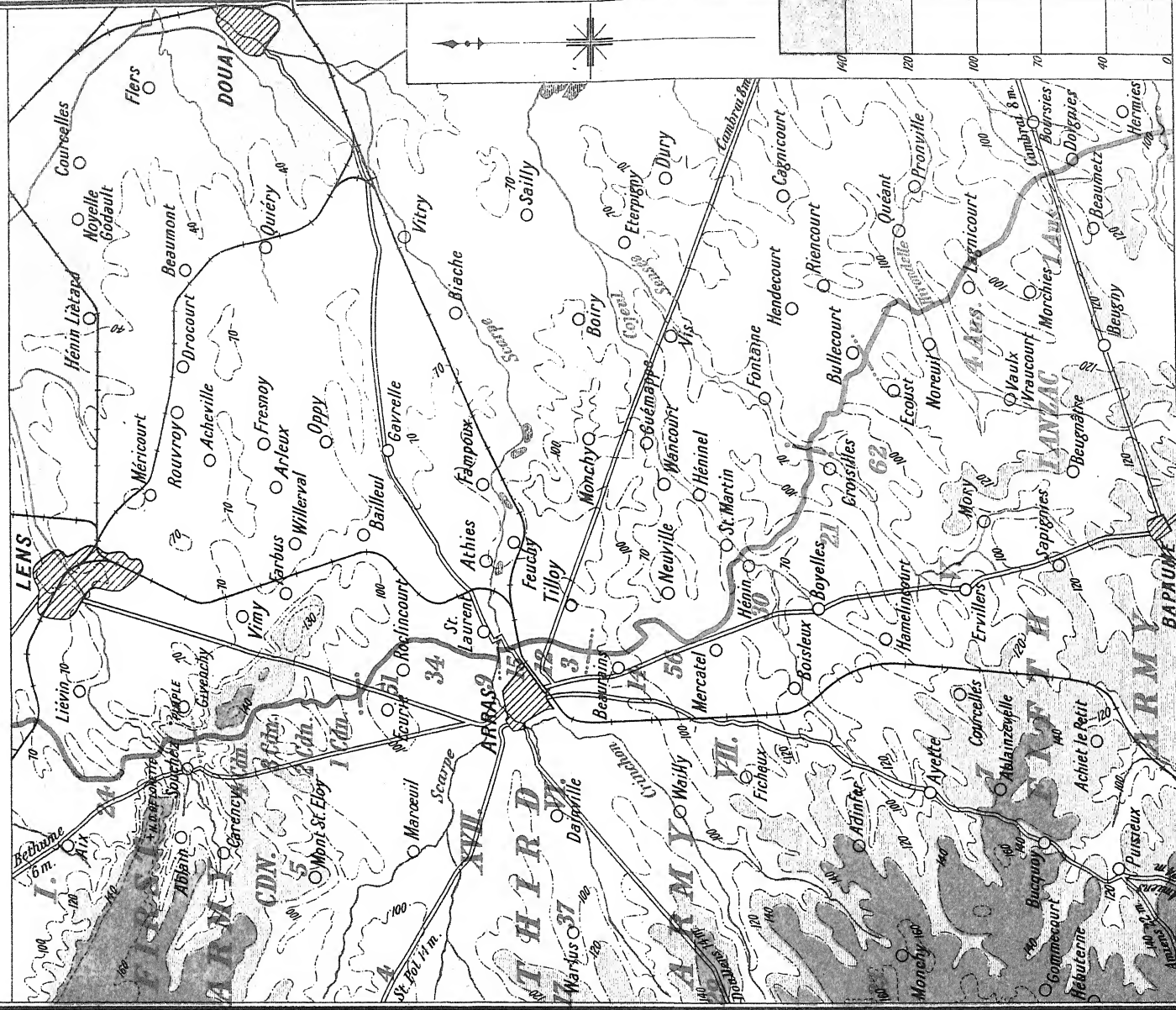


Sketch A.

THE ARRAS BATTLEFIELD, 1917.



Only main roads & railways are shown
British Line before Attack, 9th April.

Heights of Layers in metres.

Scale 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Miles.

Ordnance Survey 1933.

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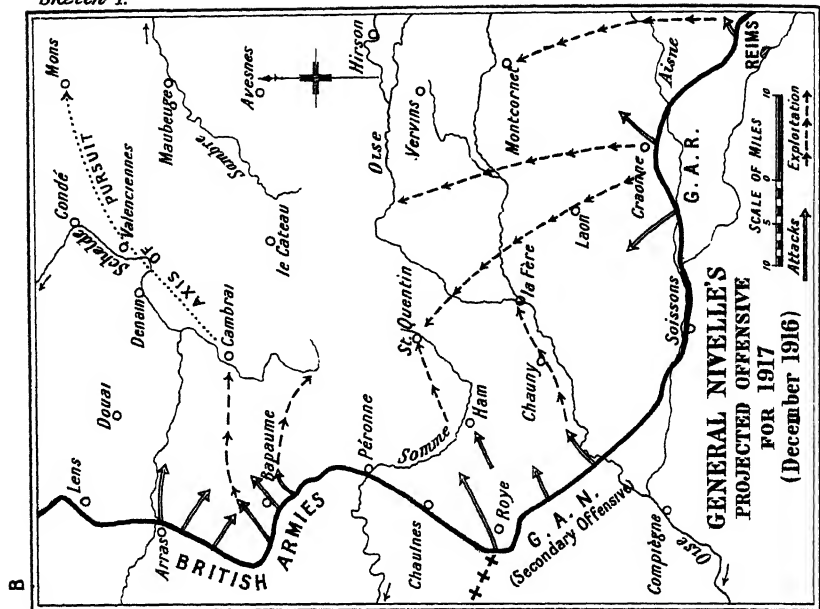
HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR
MILITARY OPERATIONS

PRESS.....11.....

SHELF.....J.....

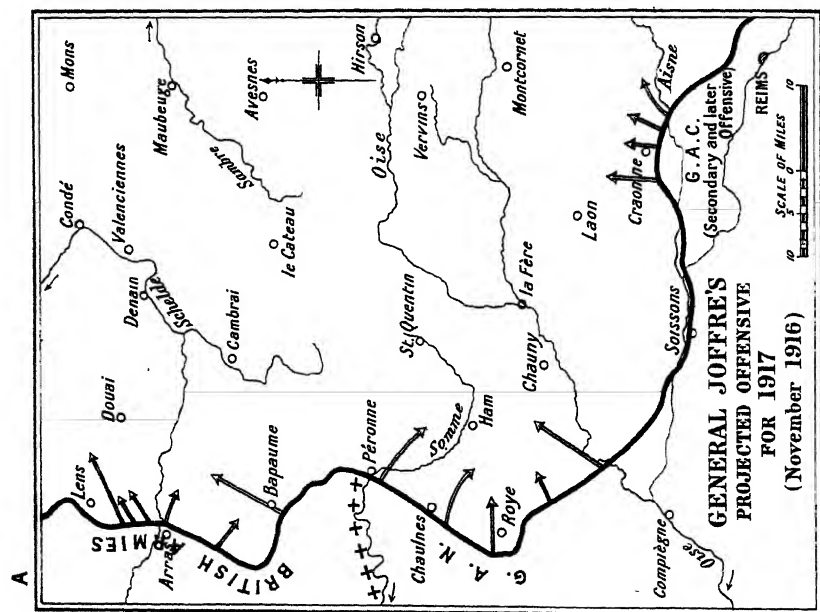
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Sketch 1.



Ordnance Survey 1899

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Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)
1917

HISTORY OF THE GREAT WAR

BASED ON OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

BY DIRECTION OF THE HISTORICAL SECTION OF THE
COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE

MILITARY OPERATIONS

FRANCE AND BELGIUM, 1917

THE GERMAN RETREAT TO THE HINDENBURG LINE AND
THE BATTLES OF ARRAS

COMPILED BY

CAPTAIN CYRIL FALLS

Late R. Innis. Fus. and General Staff

WITH A PREFACE BY

BRIGADIER-GENERAL SIR JAMES E. EDMONDS

C.B., C.M.G., Hon. D.Litt. (Oxon.), R.E. (Retired), p.s.c.
Director of the Historical Section (Military Branch)

MAPS AND SKETCHES COMPILED BY

MAJOR A. F. BECKE

R.A. (Retired), Hon. M.A. (Oxon.)

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1940

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There took part in the compilation of the
first draft of this Volume :

Lieut.-Colonel C. Hordern
(early chapters)

Captain G. C. Wynne
(throughout)

940.3
Ho

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, EDINBURGH

ADDENDUM TO " 1916 " Vol. I

Page 434, line 8. After " white flares " add new footnote :

" These white flares were a signal to the German artillery that it was shooting too short. British trench mortar bombs had been mistaken for German shells. (Explanation furnished by Herr M. Gerster of *R.I.R 119*, who was present and has since translated parts of the British account of the battle)."

ADDENDA AND CORRIGENDA TO " 1916 " Vol. II

Page 228, footnote line 3. For " 8th " read " 2nd ".

Page 379, line 19. After " barrage " add :

" Goat Trench, dug by the enemy some few days previously and extending across the right of the brigade front, was full of Germans ; but they were taken by surprise and could offer little opposition."

SKETCHES

No. 16 (Attacks on the Night 22/23 July): " International Trench ", north of the village of " Bazentin le Pt." should be " Intermediate Trench ".

CORRIGENDA TO " 1918 " Vol. III

Page 371, General Index.

" Armin, Gen. Sixt. von, (*First Army*) " should read
" (*Fourth Army*) ".

" Below, Gen. Fritz. v., (*Ninth Army*) " should read.
" (*First Army*) ".

ADDENDA TO " 1918 " Vol. I

Page 235, first line of second paragraph. After " no enemy artillery fire " add " except against the batteries in action,"

Page 236, line 9 (end of first paragraph). After " got away " add :
" Until dark the 26th Siege Battery with two 6-inch (H.V.) guns at the north edge of Vraucourt shelled enemy infantry advancing up the Hironnelle valley. The other two guns of this battery, engaged near Quéant in harassing fire on roadways, were silenced, as was a 6-inch howitzer battery, about 6 P.M., by German 5.9-inch (H.V.) guns. The four guns were got away at 5.30 A.M. on the 22nd, but one subsequently slipped into a shell-hole and was left behind."

•

ADDENDUM TO " 1918 " Vol. II

line 11 from foot. After " Lord Derby having been appointed Ambassador in Paris," add footnote :

" Twenty-one years later, Lord Derby (see " Observer " of 23rd July 1939) admitted his removal from the office of Secretary of State for War. He said in a speech, as reported, ' If you ever get the " sack " from the Chief, get him to send you to Paris. I was sent to Paris.' "

PREFACE

THIS volume, which covers the first five months of 1917, has been compiled by Captain Cyril Falls, the author of the volumes "Egypt and Palestine" and "Macedonia". It appears in its proper sequence as regards 1916, but later than the volumes on the first half of 1918. The reason for this dislocation was explained in the Prefaces to "1916" Volume I. and "1916" Volume II. : owing to reduction of staff for reasons of economy, no one was available to write "1917" until Captain Falls had completed the volumes on the campaigns in the Near East.

Many important events occurred in the period now dealt with : the inauguration of unrestricted U-Boat warfare (1st February) ; the beginning of the Russian revolution (12th March) ; and the entry of the United States of America into the War (6th April). In the military operations, the retirement to the *Siegfried-Stellung*, called by us the Hindenburg Line (14th March-5th April), was carried out by the Germans, and the Battles of Arras and the Second Battle of the Aisne (Nivelle Offensive) were fought. Serious unrest in the French Armies followed the latter ; General Pétain succeeded General Nivelle in command, and again the Allied plans were revised.

The supersession of General Joffre by General Nivelle as General-in-Chief of the French Armies of the North and North-East, just before the close of 1916, had only five months earlier brought about a complete change in the plans for 1917 on the Western Front. It had been settled at the Chantilly Conference of Allied commanders of the 15th-16th November 1916, over which General Joffre presided, that the Allies should be "ready to undertake" combined offensives from the first fortnight of February "1917, with all the means at their disposal". On the Western Front¹ preparations were taken in hand for a

¹ See Sketch 1.

combined Franco-British offensive between the Oise and Lens. Put shortly, General Joffre's intention was to broaden the frontage of the Somme battleground of 1916, the French attacking between the Oise and the Somme and the British between Bapaume and Vimy, the eight-mile gap between them—comprising the worst part of the old battlefield—being held defensively. The new French General-in-Chief rejected his predecessor's scheme, of which the strategic goals were to be determined by the extent and nature of the earlier successes. Instead, he decided to make one tremendous effort in the French area, on the Aisne, to be carried out as an act of brute force with the weight of nearly all the French resources available. This, he promised, would drive the Germans out of France and win the War. It was to be accompanied by subsidiary operations, the chief of which, astride the Scarpe, with the preliminary object of reducing the Bapaume salient, and a subsequent advance on Cambrai and Douai, were to be the contribution of the British Armies, whilst north of the Oise the French Group of Armies of the North, much reduced in strength, the British Fourth Army taking over part of its line, was to co-operate by advancing in the general direction of St. Quentin.

General Nivelle had commanded the French Second Army, before Verdun, from the 1st May to the 15th December 1916; in attacks on the 24th October and 15th December 1916 led by General Mangin, with six and eight divisions, respectively, after every German gun which it was possible to spare had been transferred to the Somme, a considerable amount of ground had been recovered and 15,000 prisoners captured. The French Official Account admits that the German divisions engaged, besides being short of artillery and ammunition, were *usées*, as the contemporary Intelligence reports showed. The German Official History leaves no doubt about the matter, showing, for instance, that all the divisions in the December fight had been exhausted either on the Somme or in the Verdun fighting, and were so weak (3,000–6,000 rifles) that two-thirds of their strength was in the front line. There was one exception, a Reserve division, "an almost negligible addition to the force".¹ The founding of a new theory

¹ "It had been two years on a very quiet front in the Vosges and had received there mainly 35–40 year old men as reinforcements. Finally, it had had to give up 1,600 to 1,800 young men for the Rumanian campaign, and had received *Landsturm* men in their place who had never been under artillery fire." G.O.A. xi., p. 425.

of attack on experience gained under such conditions showed an unwarranted assumption of the enemy's inferiority.

The change of the locality of the offensive from the Somme to the Aisne, though it prevented direct British assistance, might be defended on strategic grounds ; for success on the Aisne would bring with it the outflanking of the Hindenburg and Hunding Lines. It was, however, overlooked that the mounting of a great attack takes time. Instead of launching the attack in early February, as Joffre proposed to do, Nivelle, after many postponements, was not ready until mid-April.

The unsavoury story of the attempt by surprise, at an Allied Conference convened to discuss railway transport difficulties, to subordinate the Commander-in-Chief of the British Armies in France and Flanders to his French colleague and reduce his status to little more than that of an administrative Staff officer, could not well be omitted, as it affected the relations of General Nivelle and Sir Douglas Haig. No doubt whatever can exist that unity of command was most desirable. Sir Douglas Haig would perhaps, without much demur, have accepted General Joffre as Generalissimo, although the relations established between the two men made such an official pronouncement almost unnecessary. Against the grain, he had agreed to fight in the Somme area in 1916, and he had willingly fallen in with Joffre's views for 1917, although he would have preferred to attack in Flanders. The great Frenchman's age, personality and experience had invested him with an acknowledged prestige. But to hand over five British Armies root and branch to a hitherto junior foreign general of whose methods even his fellow generals disapproved and whose scheme Sir Douglas Haig considered altogether too sanguine, was quite a different matter.

Fearful as had been the losses of the French and British at Verdun and on the Somme, there was no thought on the part of the Allies of anything but an offensive. It was very different on the other side of the line. Having shown their weakness by making peace proposals on the 12th December 1916, and their desperation by their resort to unrestricted submarine warfare which was most likely to bring the United States into the war as an active participant, the Germans throughout the whole year 1917 were compelled to stand on the defensive on the Western Front, and during the first half of it, everywhere. For such successes

as they achieved in the later part of the year against the Russians in the "Kerenski Offensive" and at Riga, and against the Italians at Caporetto, they were able to find no more than six extra divisions—so short of men were they—which were shifted from one theatre to another. Not only were the Germans on the defensive; they also withdrew a considerable distance in the north of France. It was at first represented that this was a strategic retirement in order to avoid decisive battle until unrestricted U-Boat warfare had become effective; but the publication in 1938 of Volume XI. of the German Official Account has disposed of this reason. The credit for bringing it about must go to the French and British troops who out-fought the Germans in the long struggles at Verdun and on the Somme.

On the 11th December Ludendorff declared to General von Kuhl (Chief of the General Staff of Crown Prince Rupprecht's Group of Armies) that the Hindenburg Line "was to be regarded as a factor of safety [against a mishap] and a [voluntary] retirement to it was not intended". On the 17th January, at a conference of the principal General Staff officers, under Ludendorff's chairmanship, General von Kuhl stated that "we can no longer reckon on the old troops; there is no doubt but that in the past summer and autumn our troops have been fearfully harried and wasted"; rest and training were essential: "this demand", he insisted, "comes first and foremost and is conclusive for the campaign of 1917". On the 21st January, when the advantages of clearing out of the mud and desolation of the Verdun and Somme theatres were urged on Ludendorff by the Operations Branch of the General Staff, he repeated: "Retirement is not intended except in the case of pressing necessity". The pressure came from the fighting troops; and the urgency for the movement was accentuated by the winter operations of General Gough's Fifth Army. On the 28th January Ludendorff was told that the present positions were bad, the troops worn out, and "it is questionable whether they are still in a condition to stand such defensive battles as the Somme 1916".

To this Ludendorff replied that a voluntary retirement to the Hindenburg Line could not take place for politico-military reasons. General von Kuhl pointed out that there would be a gain of two months' time and a certain strategic freedom. What happened next we are not told

in the Official Account, but on the 4th February the Kaiser formally approved of the retirement.

The dire state of the 94 German divisions (out of a maximum total of 141 on the Western Front), which had been thrown, 43 of them twice, four three times, into what throughout the German Army was called "The Hell of the Somme" has been described in "1916" Volume II. They had lost over 650,000 men, more than the French and British combined,¹ and a smaller percentage of their wounded recovered to take the field again. It was little comfort to the Germans that they had been thrown back in hard fighting by British Armies of amateur troops, with artillery armament inferior in quantity, and in shells and fuzes in quality, led by improvised staffs. The concealment by the Germans of their true losses and the admittedly heavy French and British losses, combined with the attitude towards their generals of the Allied Governments, which, like others before them, wanted victories without bloodshed—with the result that they got bloodshed without victories—led to the moral and material advantages gained over the enemy in 1916 being wasted in 1917. Not only was General Joffre superseded, but his strategic adviser, General Foch, also fell into temporary disfavour. The change of commanders led to loss of precious time. Before Nivelle could put his Armies in motion, the Germans made their retirement and forced him to modify his subsidiary attacks, although not his main offensive. The Bapaume salient was gone, although only the right of the British Third Army was affected; the Fifth Army could now help very little, and the French offensive north of the Oise perforce dropped out. Thus on the sixty-mile line from the left of the Aisne front to the right of the British Third Army, nothing more than limited pressure could be hoped for. Under the changed conditions the British Third Army was to capture the German line "which runs from Arras towards St. Quentin, by turning it", whilst, on its left,

¹ The calculations are given in the Preface to "1916" Volume II., but the totals were slightly altered by a corrigendum issued with "1918" Volume III. The total German casualties had been put at 680,000 instead of 650,000 by a mistake in addition. The German Official History Volume XI., p. 41, however, states, "the great losses of the summer of 1916 since the beginning of the year, without the wounded whose recovery was to be expected within a reasonable time, amounted to a round figure of 1,400,000, of whom 800,000 were between July and October". From this it seems probable that the German casualties on the Somme, computed in the same manner as the British to include lightly wounded and missing, were even higher than 650,000.

the First Army had, as before, to capture Vimy Ridge. The various delays gave opportunity for leakage and the discovery by the enemy of Nivelle's plan. The German O.H.L. not only got to know of the projected offensive, but also arrayed large reinforcements to meet it. On the French side, before it was launched what has aptly been called a "Mutiny of the Generals" took place—at any rate, strong protests were made against General Nivelle's plan by responsible commanders; and after it had failed a partial mutiny of the troops manifested their discontent. Fortunately, the enemy did not get knowledge of this "effervescence" at the time, or the result might have been disastrous.

The net effect of the Nivelle fiasco was to throw the burden of the War on the Western Front on the British for the rest of the year. It made the British Commander-in-Chief's relations with his own Government easier for a time, and at the end of the year, at the Rapallo Conference, Mr. Lloyd George rejected the idea of unity of command; but, on the other hand, General Pétain, who succeeded to the command of the French Armies, made it clear that little could be expected of the French Army for some time—and the unrestricted U-Boat campaign was in full swing; Britain might be starved out before America's weight could tell; and Russia was dropping out of the War.

The Battles of Arras 1917 are best known by the capture of Vimy Ridge, which happened in the first stage. They actually included several phases: 9th to 14th April, the First Battle of the Scarpe and the Battle of Vimy Ridge; 23rd–24th April, the Second Battle of the Scarpe; 28th–29th April, the Battle of Arleux; 3rd–4th May, the Third Battle of the Scarpe, with the capture of Fresnoy; 3rd–17th May, the very desperate Battle of Bullecourt, fought after a first unsuccessful attack on the 11th April; and the fighting lasted until after the turn of the month.

Although the duration of the Battles of Arras 1917 was much shorter than that of the Battles of the Somme, or of the Battles of Ypres 1917 which were to follow, they were important and encouraging operations. The capture of Vimy Ridge, in particular, was not only a fine feat of arms, but also proved of considerable value in the following year. Including the fight round Bullecourt, 33 British and 37 German divisions took part in the battles during the period covered by the volume. The operations achieved a greater measure of initial success than in any previous

offensive—partly, it must be admitted, owing to the Staff of the German *Sixth Army* not understanding the new theory of the defensive battle—but there arose the familiar difficulties which prevented the exploitation of the victory to the full. The later stages were fought under the shadow which overhung the French offensive on the Aisne, and General Sir Edmund Allenby whilst serving under his old Staff College contemporary, now the Commander-in-Chief, and handling for the first time large masses of infantry in battle, was not at his best. Attacks were continued after they would normally have ceased. The continuance of the British attacks was naturally of assistance to the French and it was urged by Sir Douglas Haig in the hope that our Allies, for their part, would not break off their operations. It also served to some extent as a mask for preparations in Flanders.

It being unlikely, after the ill-success on the Aisne, that French co-operation would be forthcoming for a considerable time, the thoughts of the British Commander-in-Chief naturally returned to Flanders. The importance of expelling the enemy from the Flemish coast had been admitted on all hands and was demanded by naval opinion. Soon after taking over command, General Nivelle himself had approved of coastal operations by the French XXXVI. Corps in combination with the Belgians; but later he decided that action there and any British participation were unnecessary, as his own great offensive would compel the enemy to withdraw his troops from Belgium.

For the British Army, left to itself, Flanders was obviously the theatre which would give the most profitable results, and there the Navy could give assistance.

In view of the enemy's defensive attitude in 1917, one subject treated in the text, which will be developed at greater length later on, is that of the measures for the *Abwehrschlacht*, or defensive battle, adopted by the Germans. With their usual thoroughness, having decided to stand upon the defensive, they gradually evolved a system which amounted to something more even than defensive strategy and tactics, and may be described as a philosophy of the defensive. A framework for putting it into practice had been constructed by the building of the Siegfried Position. The system was not fully grasped at the time by many of the German commanders, as the handling of the reserves of the *Sixth Army* at Arras shows, and never by the Allied General Staffs; their attempts to imitate it failed at any

rate in March, April and May 1918, and attained but bare success in June and July, mainly because it required more divisions than the Allies could provide—it was expensive in man-power.

As the French Official History of the period had already appeared, there was no great need to ask for the ever-ready assistance of the *Service Historique* ; but the typescript was sent there, and many useful and helpful suggestions were kindly made by its successive chiefs, General Blin and Colonel Bonnassieux. The German Official History also covers the period, but the German Historical Section, now the *Kriegsgeschichtliche Forschungsanstalt des Heeres*, has been as helpful as ever. Gratitude is particularly due to Herr Direktor Foerster for the extremely interesting German information on Map 11, of the French Aisne offensive, which, from the strategic point of view at least, shows the dispositions for the defensive battle in perfection.¹ “*Mein Kriegstagebuch*”, by Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, has been so useful that it deserves especial mention.

The German regimental histories have proved even more valuable than usual. By means of a careful examination of all published histories of regiments, artillery as well as infantry, which took part in the Battles of Arras 1917, Captain G. C. Wynne has not only been able to trace the course of events in more detail than they are given in the official monograph, but has also unearthed and pieced together the German methods of defence, in principle and practice. Only a fraction of his material has found a place here, but it might well prove of value to students.²

The compiler is greatly indebted to the very large number of combatants to whom the draft of the volume has been circulated for comments, additions and corrections. It is not ungraciousness but recognition that Time is a relentless and invincible combatant, if it is added that, though individual replies have been most helpful, the contributions do not quite equal in total value those of the past. Gaps in the ranks grow ever more numerous. Apart from that, twenty years have been added to the ages of all who took part in these events, and memories of them have to span the same period. Recollections of the Battles of

¹ This preface was written before the outbreak of hostilities with Germany, but the fact that we are now at war with Direktor Foerster's country does not appear to render it any the less necessary to acknowledge his courtesy.

² Captain Wynne's articles in the “*Army Quarterly*” from January 1939 onwards may usefully be read with this volume.

Arras are not as vivid in general now as I found those of Loos and the first days of the Battles of the Somme, and Captain Falls found those of the Battles of Gaza and of Megiddo, when the Branch was engaged upon them some ten years ago. Yet there are still some men who seem to have every incident and almost every fold in the ground engraved upon their memories.

In thanking those who have given assistance I must make mention by name of Dr. C. E. W. Bean, M.A., Litt.D., the Australian Official Historian, for his criticism. Even greater has been the value of his work, Volume IV. of "The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18", which is so full and thorough that it can be used with confidence as a source-book. This is of great importance, because a large proportion of the copies of Australian records deposited in this country were made by process of photography to save time and labour and many of them are now fading. Captain Wynne, who not only dealt with the German side but also compiled the chapters on the Canadian victory at Vimy Ridge, was given valuable help by Colonel A. Fortescue-Duguid, Director of the Historical Section of the Department of National Defence, Ottawa, and by Major-General A. G. L. Macnaughton, who took an immense amount of trouble. In addition, for the air operations, Volume III. of "The War in the Air" was available, and its author, Mr. H. A. Jones, M.C., gave his personal assistance.

Lieut.-Colonel J. S. Yule, O.B.E., late R.E., kindly gave his assistance as regards the technical side of the bridging of the Somme.

The names of the two officers who took part in compiling the first draft of the volume are printed opposite the opening page. The other members of the staff of the Historical Section, in particular Mr. A. W. Tarsey, all gave their help in the collection of material and in seeing the volume through the press. Mr. W. B. Wood, M.A. (Oxon.), and Lieut.-Colonel H. G. de Watteville, C.B.E., M.A. (Oxon.), R.A. retired (p.s.c.), as in the case of previous volumes, provided invaluable criticism of the final draft.

All officers interested may not have seen the draft or proofs. I beg, therefore, as I have done in previous volumes, that any corrections or additions, and criticisms thought necessary, may be sent to the Secretary of the Historical Section, Committee of Imperial Defence, Audit House,

Victoria Embankment, London, E.C.4. At the same time, I offer my thanks to those who so kindly furnished corrections for the earlier volumes. A sheet of "Addenda and Corrigenda" is enclosed in this volume.

J. E. E.

September 1939.

NOTES

THE location of troops and places is written from right to left of the front of the Allied Forces, unless otherwise stated. In translations from the German the order given is as in the original. Where roads which run through both the British and the German lines are described by the names of towns or villages, the place in British hands is mentioned first, thus : " Arras — Cambrai road ".

The convention observed in the British Expeditionary Force is followed as regards the distinguishing numbers of Armies, Corps, Divisions, etc., of the British and Allied Armies ; that is, they are written in full for Armies, in Roman figures for Corps, and in Arabic for smaller formations and units, except Artillery Brigades, which are given in Roman figures : thus : Fourth Army, IV. Corps, 4th Cavalry Division, 4th Division, 4th Cavalry Brigade, 4th Brigade, IV. Brigade R.F.A.

German formations and units, to distinguish them from those of the Allies, are printed in italic characters, thus : *First Army, I. Corps, 1st Division*.

The usual abbreviations of regimental names have been used : for example, " 8/Somerset L.I." or " Somerset " for " 8th Battalion the Somerset Light Infantry (Prince " Albert's) " ; K.O.Y.L.I. for the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, etc.¹ Divisions are introduced by their full titles, e.g. " 62nd (2nd West Riding) Division ", but afterwards referred to by numerals only.

Some other abbreviations employed are G.H.Q. for British General Headquarters, G.Q.G. for French Grand Quartier-Général, O.H.L. for German *Oberste Heeresleitung* (Supreme Command) ; and G.A.C., G.A.E., G.A.N., G.A.R. for French Groupe d'Armées du Centre, de l'Est, du Nord, and de Réserve respectively.

The hyphens in French place-names are omitted.

¹ The Yorkshire Regiment is usually called in the text by its ancient name " The Green Howards ".

MAPS AND SKETCHES

THE layered end-paper (Sketch A) has been provided to show in a general way the configuration of the Arras—Vimy battlefield, and the British front line has been overprinted on it so as to show its position with reference to the ground at the opening of this series of battles. A layered page-size Sketch (No. 12), with the British front line on the 14th April overprinted on it, has been given to show military students the situation after the capture of the Vimy Ridge, and the nature of the ground which then confronted each of the three Armies. The other end-paper (Sketch B) shows the general situation on the Western Front at the conclusion of the Battles of Arras.

It will be sufficient for the ordinary reader to refer to Sketch A for the form of the ground ; but for the military student two layered maps are included in the Map Case : Map 1 depicts the ground over which the Germans retreated to the Siegfried Position (called by us the Hindenburg Line) ; and it also shows in broad outline the siting of that position and its northern extension, the Wotan Position (Drocourt—Quéant Line). The other (Map 8) shows the Arras—Vimy battlefield at a scale of 1/40,000 with the position of the British line before the battle opened on the 9th April.

The situation maps and sketches, if not otherwise described, give the position of the troops at the beginning of the day for the date they bear, and the subsequent advances.

A special map is given to show the positions of the Heavy and Siege Artillery Batteries which were concentrated to assist the attack of the Canadian Corps at Vimy.

Two maps (11 and 12) illustrate General Nivelle's offensive in April 1917 ; one shows the French concentration together with the German defensive dispositions, and the other depicts the penetration which was effected.

As far as possible endeavour has been made to insert on all maps and sketches every place and trench name

mentioned in the text ; the positions of any small localities which have been omitted, to save overcrowding, are described in the text. Students should consult the large scale map of the opening operations in each corps area for any additional topographical detail that it was impossible to place on a sketch.

The maps and sketches have been drawn for reproduction by Mr. H. Burge.

For the spelling of place-names, except in the cases of Maps 1 and 3 (which are portions of maps prepared during the War), the French 1/80,000 maps has been followed ; for the few Belgian names in the coastal sector, that used in the Belgian survey (made prior to the War) has been accepted.

A. F. B.

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6. G.H.Q. Letter No. O.A.D. 258 to General Officers Commanding Armies and the Cavalry Corps, 2nd January 1917.
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11. Battles of Arras 1917 : Plan of Operations for First Army, 31st January.
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31. Battles of Arras 1917 : Cavalry Corps Instructions, No. G.X. 96/48, 1st April.
32. Battles of Arras 1917 : XVII. Corps Order No. 27, 2nd April.
33. Battles of Arras 1917 : Cavalry Corps, Means of Communication, No. G.X. 96/48/1, 2nd April.
34. Telegraphic Orders by Fifth Army, 2nd April 1917.
35. Battles of Arras 1917 : 37th Division Instructions No. 6, Administrative Arrangements (Q), 2nd April.
36. Battles of Arras 1917 : Instructions to the Cavalry Corps, Third Army No. G.S. 21/11, 3rd April.
37. Battles of Arras 1917 : Instructions to 1st Brigade Heavy Branch, Machine Gun Corps, Third Army No. G.S. 8/31, 3rd April.
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49. Battles of Arras 1917 : First Army Order No. 108, 14th April.
50. Battles of Arras 1917 : Third Army Order No. 183, 20th April.
51. Battles of Arras 1917 : G.H.Q. Letter No. O.A.D. 426. Record of a Conference held at Noyelle Vion, 30th April.
52. Battles of Arras 1917 : Some First Army Statistics, Battle of Vimy Ridge.

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 11. French Offensive, April 1917 : with German Defensive Dispositions.
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LIST OF BOOKS

TO WHICH MOST FREQUENT REFERENCE IS MADE

AUSTRALIAN OFFICIAL ACCOUNT (A.O.A.): "The Australian Imperial Force in France". Volume IV. By C. E. W. Bean. (Australia : Angus & Robertson.)

Reference is made in the preface to the outstanding importance of this volume in view of the leading part played by the Australian troops in the events recorded.

FELDZUGSAUFZEICHNUNGEN: By General Otto von Moser. (Stuttgart : Chr. Belsersche Verlagsbuchhandlung.)

The journal of the Corps Commander concerned in the Bullecourt operations and in the German counter-attack at Lagnicourt.

FRENCH OFFICIAL ACCOUNT (F.O.A.): "Les Armées françaises dans la Grande Guerre". Ministère de la Guerre : État-Major de l'Armée. Service Historique. (Paris : Imprimerie Nationale.)

The two volumes of Tome V., with annexes containing documents and cases of maps, cover the period dealt with in this volume.

GERMAN OFFICIAL ACCOUNT (G.O.A.): "Der Weltkrieg". (Berlin : Mittler.)

"Band 11 : Die Kriegführung im Herbst 1916 und im Winter 1916-1917" covers the period only up to the decision to retreat to the Hindenburg Line.

HERBILLON: "Le Général Alfred Micheler". By Colonel E. Herbillon. (Paris : Plon.)

The author was one of the two liaison officers between the French Commander-in-Chief on the one hand and the President of the Republic and the Government on the other. Quoting the correspondence of General Micheler, he throws an interesting light upon the "Nivelle Offensive".

KUHL: "Der Weltkrieg 1914-1918". By General von Kuhl. (Berlin : Kolk.)

A useful two-volume history of the War, especially so for this period, during which the author was Chief of the Staff to Field-Marshal Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, the Army Group Commander exclusively concerned with the British operations here described.

LOSSBERG : " Meine Tätigkeit im Weltkrieg 1914-1918 ". By Fritz von Lossberg. (Berlin : Mittler.)

After the *débâcle* of the 9th April, Major-General, then Colonel, von Lossberg was brought in as Chief of the Staff to the *Sixth Army* with full powers. He may be regarded as probably the foremost tactician on the Western Front.

LUDENDORFF : " My War Memories 1914-1918 ". By General Erich Ludendorff. (English Edition : Hutchinson & Co.)

OSTERSCHLACHT : " Die Osterschlacht bei Arras 1917 ". Issued by the Reichsarchiv. (Berlin : Stalling.)

The two-volume German official monograph devoted to the British Arras offensive.

RUPPRECHT : " Mein Kriegstagebuch ". By Field-Marshal Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria. (Munich : Deutscher National Verlag.)

As almost always, this carefully-kept journal is of the highest value and has constantly been consulted.

SCHWARTE iii : " Der deutsche Landkrieg ". Edited by Lieut.-General M. Schwarte. (Leipzig : Barth.)

A well-known and reliable general history of the War.

WAR IN THE AIR : " Being the Story of the Part played in the Great War by the Royal Air Force ". By H. A. Jones. (Oxford : Clarendon Press.)

The British Official History. Volume III. is that which has been chiefly consulted.

The Official History of the Great War, Military Operations, is referred to by the year in question followed by the number of the volume, *e.g.*, " 1916 " Vol. I., for France and Belgium, and by the titles " Egypt & Palestine " and " Macedonia ", also followed by the number of the volume, for the accounts of those campaigns.

References to the War histories of German regiments are given in the form " Regt. No. " without using the sometimes cumbrous titles of these volumes.

CALENDAR OF PRINCIPAL EVENTS

Mainly extracted from "Principal Events 1914-18" compiled by the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, London. His Majesty's Stationery Office. 10s. 6d. net.

Western Theatre.		Other Theatres.	Naval Warfare and General Events.
3rd.		JANUARY 1917	
3rd.	Announcement of Sir Douglas Haig's promotion to the rank of Field-Marshal (appointment made by King George V. 27th Dec. 1916).	<i>Rumania</i> : Austro-German offensive continues (began 2nd Sept. 1916).	
	First units of Portuguese Expeditionary Force land in France.		
5th.		<i>Russia</i> : Battle of the Aa begins (ends 8th Feb.). <i>Rumania</i> : Braila taken by German forces. <i>Rumania</i> : Dobruja evacuated by Russian and Rumanian forces.	5th-7th. Inter-Allied Conference in Rome.
6th.		<i>Mesopotamia</i> : Battle of Kut 1917 begins (ends 24th Feb.).	
9th.		<i>Egypt</i> : Action of Rafah.	

CALENDAR OF PRINCIPAL EVENTS—(continued)

Western Theatre.	Other Theatres.	Naval Warfare and General Events.
JANUARY 1917—(continued)		
	10th.	Allied Governments reply to President Wilson's Note. Allied war aims outlined (see 18th Dec. 1916).
	11th.	Settlement Treaty between Germany and Turkey signed in Berlin.
	17th.	Central Powers issue Note repudiating responsibility for continuance of the War and declare they will prosecute it to successful end.
	19th.	Inter-Allied Conference (Commission de Ravitaillement) assembles in St. Petersburg (dissolves 20th Feb.).
		German Government instruct their Minister in Mexico to negotiate alliance with Mexico and Japan against the United States.
	23rd.	Naval action off Harwich.
	25th.	Suffolk coast towns shelled by German destroyers.
	28th.	German Government announce forthcoming "unrestricted" submarine warfare.

FEBRUARY 1917

During this month 105 British merchant ships (gross tonnage, 313,486) were lost by enemy action.

German unrestricted submarine warfare begins.
U.S.A. sever diplomatic relations with Germany.

British Government pledge that restitution of Alsace-Lorraine is an object of the War.

**Australian War Government
formed.**

German destroyer raid on
Margate and Broadstairs.

Anglo-French Conference at Calais on unity of command.

Publication of German proposals to Mexico (see 19th Jan.).

1st.

3rd.

14th.

17th.

25th.

28th.

3rd-5th.

8th.

**Affair of Maisons de Champagne (French front).
Actions of Miraumont.**

German forces begin withdrawal from front-line positions on the Ancre.
Capture of the Tilloy.

25th.

Mesopotamia: Kut reoccupied by British forces. Pursuit to Baghdad begins.

26th-27th, Anglo-French Conference at

mand.

Publication of German proposals to Mexico (see 19th Jan.).

15th.

17th-18th.

21st.

25th-2nd Mar.

CALENDAR OF PRINCIPAL EVENTS—(continued)

Western Theatre.	Other Theatres.	Naval Warfare and General Events.
<div data-bbox="236 654 256 795">MARCH 1917</div>		
4th.	German attack at Bezonvaux (right bank of the Meuse).	During this month 127 British merchant ships (gross tonnage, 353,478) were lost by enemy action.
10th.	Capture of Irlès.	
	11th.	
	11th.	
	11th.	<i>Mesopotamia</i> : Baghdad occupied by British forces. <i>Persia</i> : Kirmanshah taken by Russian forces. <i>Balkans</i> : Allied offensive to free Monastir begins.
		12th. Russian Revolution begins. 12th-13th. Anglo-French Conference in London on unity of command.
		14th. New Provisional Government proclaimed in Russia.
		China severs diplomatic relations with Germany.
		15th. Nicholas II., Tsar of Russia, abdicates.
		16th. Russian naval mutiny breaks out in Baltic.
16th.	German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line begins.	German Zeppelin L. 39 destroyed at Compiègne after returning from raid on U.K.
17th.	Bapaume occupied by British forces. Roye occupied by French forces.	

18th.	Péronne occupied by British forces. Noyon occupied by French forces.	French Ministry (M. A. Briand, Premier; General Roques, Minister for War) resigns. German destroyer raid on Ramsgate and Broadstairs.
19th.		French battleship <i>Danton</i> sunk by submarine in Mediterranean.
20th.		M. Ribot becomes French Premier and Minister for Foreign Affairs, and M. Painlevé appointed French Minister for War.
22nd.		First meeting of British Imperial War Conference. Provisional Government in Russia recognised by Great Britain and France.
23rd.	<i>Balkans</i> : Allied offensive to free Monastir ends.	
26th-27th.	<i>Palestine</i> : First Battle of Gaza.	
30th.		Russia proclaims independence of Poland.
31st.		Prince Sixte of Bourbon brings to M. Poincaré a letter from the Austrian Emperor (of the 24th March) containing proposals for the opening of conversations with a view to peace.

CALENDAR OF PRINCIPAL EVENTS—(continued)

Western Theatre.	Other Theatres.	Naval Warfare and General Events.
APRIL 1917		
1st.	British operations against the outposts of the Hindenburg Line begin.	During this month 169 British merchant ships (gross tonnage, 545,282) were lost by enemy action.
9th.	<p>Battles of Arras 1917 begin.</p> <p>First Battle of the Scarpe 1917 begins (ends 14th).</p> <p>Battle of Vimy Ridge begins (ends 14th).</p> <p>First Attack on Bullecourt.</p> <p>German Attack on Lagnicourt.</p> <p>Second Battle of the Aisne ("Nivelle Offensive") begins.</p>	<p>5th. British Government announce their adherence to the principle of an independent and united Poland.</p> <p>6th. U.S.A. declare war on Germany. French Council of War at Compiègne.</p> <p>7th. Austria-Hungary severs diplomatic relations with U.S.A.</p> <p>9th. Russian Provisional Government declares for self-determination of peoples and a durable peace.</p>
16th.		16th. Arrival of Lenin in Russia.

17th.	Battle of the Hills (Champagne) begins (ends 20th).	17th-19th. <i>Palestine</i> : Second Battle of Gaza.	19th.	Allied Conference at St. Jean de Maurienne regarding Macedonian Campaign.
20th.	Second Battle of the Aisne ends.	24th. <i>Mesopotamia</i> : Samarra taken by British forces.	20th.	German destroyer raid on Straits of Dover.
23rd-24th.	Second Battle of the Scarpe 1917.	24th-25th. <i>Balkans</i> : Battle of Dojran 1917 (first phase).	26th.	German destroyer raid on Ramsgate.
28th-29th.	Battle of Arleux.		29th.	General Pétain appointed Chief of the General Staff of the French Army at the Ministry of War.
		MAY 1917		
3rd.	Battle of Bullecourt begins.			During this month 122 British merchant ships (gross tonnage, 352,289) were lost by enemy action.
3rd-4th.	Third Battle of the Scarpe 1917.		2nd.	First United States destroyer flotilla arrives at Queens-town.
4th.	Resumption of French Offensive on the Aisne and in Champagne (ends 9th). Battles of Arras 1917 end.		4th-5th.	Anglo-French Conference at Paris on the conduct of operations.

CALENDAR OF PRINCIPAL EVENTS—(continued)

Western Theatre.	Other Theatres.	Naval Warfare and General Events.
	MAY 1917—(continued)	
5th.	<i>Balkans</i> : Battle of the Vardar begins (ends 22nd).	
		7th. First night aeroplane raid on London.
8th-9th.	<i>Balkans</i> : Battle of Dojran 1917 (second phase).	
		10th. Major-General J. Pershing appointed to command United States Expeditionary Force.
12th.	<i>Italy</i> : Tenth Battle of the Isonzo begins (ends 8th June).	
		14th. German Zeppelin L. 22 destroyed in North Sea.
		15th. Action between Austrian and British light forces in the Straits of Otranto.
		General Pétain succeeds General Nivelle as French Commander-in-Chief.
		General Foch succeeds General Pétain as Chief of the General Staff of the French Army at the Ministry of War.
		16th. M. Kerenski appointed Russian Minister of War.

17th.	Battle of Bullecourt ends.	Admiralty appoint committee to draw up plan for convoy of merchant ships.
18th.		Compulsory Service Act becomes law in the U.S.
19th.		Russia issues declaration against separate peace.
20th.		Serbian Government transfers from Corfu to Salonika.
22nd.		Count Tisza, Hungarian Premier, resigns.
25th.		First large aeroplane raid on England.
30th.	<i>East Africa</i> : Lieut.-General van Deventer succeeds Lieut.-General A. R. Hoskins as Commander-in-Chief.	

CHAPTER I

THE PROSPECTS OF 1917

(Map 1; Sketches 1, 2)

THE CHANTILLY CONFERENCE

ON the 15th November 1916, the British Commander-in-Chief in France and Belgium and representatives of the other Allies met at French G.Q.G., at Chantilly. General Joffre, Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies, presided. In addition to General Sir Douglas Haig, Great Britain was represented by General Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, who was accompanied by Major-General F. B. Maurice, Director of Military Operations.

The atmosphere of the Conference was one of sober optimism, reflected in the geniality with which General Joffre greeted the assembly. The tidings of the moment from the Western Front were good: there had been a considerable French victory at Verdun in October, and the advance of the British Fifth Army up the Ancre valley was in full progress. Yet the optimism was due to more than reports of happily-executed local operations, and was justified by the general situation.

The year 1916 had witnessed a great increase in the fury and destructiveness of the War, and also a heating of national temper among the chief belligerents. They had lavishly increased their armament. They had adapted all their industries to the production of weapons and other materials of war. They were buying from the neutrals to fill the gaps in their own equipment, so that a great proportion of the factories of the civilized world were becoming in effect one gigantic arsenal. In the hope that victory would ease future burdens, and not daring to face a future without victory, they were not only sacrificing the blood of their sons and their present wealth, but also mortgaging the

resources of generations unborn. Passions had so swelled that any word of conciliation seemed to be spoken with the lips of treason. The great battles had assumed an aspect altogether different to that of their predecessors in 1915, and the spirit of the nations had changed in like degree. The combat was working up to its greatest intensity, and just as the new "drum-fire" of the artillery deafened the soldier, so those in higher places risked being deafened by the moral clamour. Their view was wide enough to ensure that they had not been cozened into the belief that victory was certain. The likelihood was rather that if they lost their sense of proportion the lack of it would have the contrary effect, shocking the weaker into abandonment of hope and impelling the stronger to some desperate expedient as a means of escape.

For the military commander it was, however, fatal to allow the mind to be obsessed by the magnitude or the horror of the War. The greater the scope of its tragedy, the more need that it should be surveyed calmly and dispassionately. Stripped to its essentials, the situation confronting the two cool-headed men who were the chief figures of the Chantilly Conference was as follows.

Both sides could derive a measure of satisfaction from the events of 1916, though at this moment the most spectacular exploit of the Central Powers, the overthrow of Rumania, had not yet been quite accomplished.¹ Yet the Allies had the better right to be sanguine. They had to look back upon positive achievement, marred though it was by mistakes, by lessons learnt at fearful cost, and by ill fortune. Germany and her Allies, on the other hand, could congratulate themselves, at least as regards the past six months, only upon the fact that they had escaped disaster with the skin of their teeth, that is, on negative achievement. Nor could there be any question as to which side had the brighter prospects in the coming year. On the Western Front, in particular, the Entente was steadily waxing stronger, largely owing to the increased output of British munition factories, and in material resources would soon have a considerable superiority over the enemy. Numerically, it had that already, and could somewhat increase it. Morally—but again we must apply the statement mainly if not wholly to the Western Front—the

¹ Actually, while the Conference was in session, General von Falkenhayn was winning the Second Battle of Târga Jiu, which enabled him to debouch into the Wallachian plain, thereby rendering the issue of the contest certain.

advantage was also on its side. The Battles of the Somme had resulted in enormous loss to attackers as well as to defenders, but it was the defenders who had suffered the greater strain and moral damage.

Looking back upon the plans for the year that had passed: how far had performance gone to meet expectation? What was the balance of profit and loss? It had been decided, also at Chantilly, at a military conference held between the 6th and 8th December 1915, to seek a decision by co-ordinated offensives on the three principal fronts, the Franco-British, the Russian, and the Italian.¹ What had been accomplished?

In the first place, Germany had anticipated the Allied offensive in France and modified the French part in it by the attack at Verdun. But in that tremendous battle, which raged from the 21st February until the opening of the Battles of the Somme, and continued on a minor scale until the end of August, the French defence had had the better of it. Even of the relatively small amount of ground lost, some of the most valuable had been recovered by the French counter-offensive on the 24th October. And, though the defence of Verdun had drawn upon French troops which were to have taken part in the attack astride the Somme, it had not prevented the French Armies from playing a considerable part in the battle.

Russia had thrown into the scales, as her contribution, her greatest exploit of the whole War, the offensive of General Brusilov, commanding the Group of Armies of the South-West. Launched on the 4th June, this attack had resulted in an advance of twenty to fifty miles on a front of some two hundred, overflowed Bukovina, and finally reached the foot of the Carpathians, having brought in a haul of 450,000 prisoners and 400 guns. Unfortunately, the offensive at Baranovichi of the Group of Armies further north, under General Evert, launched late and half-heartedly against the Germans, had been by comparison a failure. The blow to the Austro-Hungarian Armies was, none the less, shattering, and German reserves had been drawn in to build up a new front.

In Italy, again, the enemy had struck first, but his offensive in the Trentino, begun on the 14th May, had achieved only a partial success, further limited, after troops had been recalled to check the advance of Brusilov, by the Italian counter-offensive in June. The Austrian attack

¹ See "1916" Vol. I., p. 7.

had, however, upset the plans of the Italian High Command, and retarded its contribution to the general scheme. This took the form of successive thrusts in August, September, October and November—Sixth, Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Battles of the Isonzo—against the Carso plateau, possession of which would have opened the road to Trieste. Only in the first battle were there any appreciable gains, at Gorizia; but the enemy had been hard pressed.

The results of the Battles of the Somme are more difficult to estimate. At its opening, on the 1st July 1916, the tactical methods had been to a great extent an open question, to be decided as circumstances dictated. The British Commander-in-Chief favoured an attempt to break the enemy's front quickly, but the principal executant, General Sir Henry Rawlinson, had from the first advocated a deliberate step-by-step advance in the nature of siege warfare on a gigantic scale.¹ Within a very short time any chance there was of exploiting the first-named method had disappeared, and the second, certainly slow but, it was hoped, sure, had been adopted. The battle had resolved itself into a bitter and costly struggle to capture the high ground from Saily Saillisel to Beaumont Hamel, but, still more, to wear out its defenders—a battle of attrition, which was in accord with the original conception of General Joffre.

There is no doubt that in the course of the summer the situation of the Central Powers had become precarious. The comparative failure of the Trentino offensive, the shock of Brusilov's blow, had shaken not only the Austro-Hungarian Armies, but the fabric of the Dual Monarchy itself. The fighting power of the Germans had at first been little weakened—though it was before summer was out, and the withdrawal of early 1917 was to be, however one takes it, an admission that they could not stand up to this terrible milling at close quarters when the next campaigning season came round. Yet if against any opponents but British and French they were still almost irresistible, they were tied down on every front. A division here, an army corps there, rushed on to a stricken field could still transform its fortunes, or at worst bring the assailant quickly to a halt. Such reinforcements were, however, becoming harder and harder to find. When the prospect of Rumania's intervention obtruded itself, it was grave enough to chill the most confident heart. Had Rumania struck six weeks earlier and based her stroke upon a better strategical plan,

¹ See "1916" Vol. I, pp. 254-8.

had General Evert's Armies pulled their weight, it almost seemed that a decisive victory could have been won.

As it was, the chances had been allowed to slip away. Germany had taken the most drastic measures, dismissed the Chief of the General Staff and virtual Commander-in-Chief, General von Falkenhayn, and replaced him by Field-Marshal von Hindenburg and General Ludendorff; cut losses and pocketed pride by closing down the Verdun offensive; and—most important of all—forced upon her Austro-Hungarian, Turkish, and Bulgarian allies the principle of unified command in German hands. She had scraped together the German troops necessary to stiffen the motley armies opposed to the Rumanians in Siebenbürgen and Bulgaria, and, making the most of limited means by brilliant leadership, was now engaged in the offensive which was to end with the overthrow of Rumania. She had likewise contrived to bolster up the Bulgarian front in western Macedonia, hard pressed by the Franco-Serbian offensive known as the Battle of Monastir.

Her projects on the Western Front were still unknown to the Entente, but, as a fact, almost immediately after the first visit to France of the now all-powerful *dioscouri*, Hindenburg and Ludendorff, precautions had been taken in case she should be forced to a withdrawal on the Somme, and at the end of September the construction had been begun of a new system of defence from Arras, through St. Quentin, to the neighbourhood of Vailly on the Aisne: that "Siegfried-Stellung", which was to be known to the British as the Hindenburg Line.

The Allies had every right to look for a much larger measure of success in the year 1917. They had experimented with various methods and had gained vast experience, though at a vast price. Except on the Rumanian fronts they had, it appeared, paralysed the enemy's capacity for offensive action: they had even been on the point of breaking his defensive power. Now, it did not seem too much to hope that the time was coming for operations of a decisive nature. Modifying where necessary the methods employed in 1916, but maintaining the general type of operations which had brought them so near to victory, co-ordinating their action still more carefully, throwing still more energy into the prosecution of their task, they would strive to bring the War to a victorious end before 1917 was out.

There was no easy road to victory. Neither General

Joffre nor Sir Douglas Haig believed in the possibility of finding a "way round" which it would not have been easier for the Central Powers, with their interior lines, to block than for the Allies to open. While earnestly desirous that the maximum effort, relatively to existing resources, should be made in all theatres of the War, they were both convinced that the main effort would have to be made on the Western Front. And here there was no flank to be turned, no key position within easy striking distance. In order to break the enemy's front it would be necessary first of all to break its power of resistance. This involved defeating not only the troops on the front of attack but also the reserves which would be hurried to the battlefield.

The word "attrition" has to-day an evil significance—as it had to the Federal Armies of the United States in 1864—typifying in the ears of the post-war world the long-drawn-out struggles in the mud and blood of Verdun, the Somme, and the Ypres Salient. Yet in itself it implies simply the process of wearing down the enemy's will and power, as practised by Grant, and even, in a sense, by Marlborough and Napoleon. With a continuous front from Switzerland to the sea, served by excellent communications for the movement of reserves, fortified in depth by means of barbed wire and entrenchments, liberally supplied with the machine gun, the best defensive weapon yet created, such a battle might last for weeks or months. Even then chance, a local accident, a change of weather might alter everything, and give the foe a breathing-space, whilst the victory which eager hands were stretching out to clutch slipped further away with the mocking elusiveness of a will-o'-the-wisp. Whether those who believed that the main battle must be fought in France and Belgium were right or wrong is open to discussion; but to pretend that such mischances could have been avoided by seeking a new front is folly. Since the failure of the Gallipoli enterprise there was no European theatre of the War—which is almost to say, no theatre vital to the Central Powers—where British or French troops would not, almost immediately after their transfer, have to meet German in the same ratio to their own strength and with capabilities of defence in the same ratio to their own offensive powers as in France.

On the Western Front, where the security of communications with the manufacturing bases was almost complete,

there was reason for hoping that the methods evolved in the later part of the Battles of the Somme and at Verdun would continue to prove fruitful. These methods involved advances by successive strong thrusts of limited scope, each bound being confined to an objective within the capacity of the infantry to reach and to hold without serious risk from the counter-attack. This entailed that each successive attack must also be within the capacity of the field artillery to support it, and that after each bound there must follow a brief pause for the reorganization of the whole offensive machine, so that the next objective might be attacked with almost equally careful preparation and with equal prospects of success. By such methods some fleeting opportunities might be lost. Yet the conception did not necessarily entail complete rigidity. If the enemy's resistance were found to be weakening, the depth of the thrust could be enlarged, the pace quickened, the preparations shortened. And always the eyes of commanders would be kept open for opportunities elsewhere, for openings for a surprise attack on a new front, largely denuded of artillery and reserves, where perhaps bolder and more ambitious methods could be employed. Sir Douglas Haig, for his part, was not dominated by any preconception. Actually, he began 1917 at Arras with a comparatively ambitious aim, a swift advance on Cambrai, and returned at Ypres to a strictly limited offensive.

It might be that in the still experimental tank the Allies possessed a weapon which would transform the situation and free them from the uninspiring form of warfare of the Somme; but this was not yet certain. They could only push forward the production of the new weapon and exploit it as opportunity offered, increasing its rôle as it proved itself, in the hope that it would enable them to abandon the methods described above. These were indeed uninspiring, but they were not, as is sometimes stated, the fruit of defective imagination. They were possibly not the only reply, but they were a reasoned reply to the defensive methods of the "empty" battlefield, the concealed machine gun, the slab of reinforced concrete, the coil of barbed wire, the shelter in the bowels of the earth. They represented an effort to minimize, in the new conditions, what Clausewitz calls the *friction* of warfare—those inevitable mischances which cause performance to fall short of promise—just as the "strategic square" or the two wings and a reserve of Napoleon represented an

effort to minimize this friction in the conditions of the wars of the Empire.

It was perhaps only in France and Belgium that tactical considerations dominated those of strategy to so great an extent; but everywhere the opposing forces had gone to ground, and everywhere trench warfare in some form had paralysed the battle front. Outside France and Belgium, however, it was only strategy that concerned General Joffre, the unofficial co-ordinator of the military effort of the Allies. As he looked round on other European theatres, he could see signs of doubt, weariness and, at least in Russia, of inefficiency. Yet even in Russia the forces were probably better equipped than they had ever been; nor was there reason to suppose that such fatigue and deterioration as were to be observed exceeded those reported in the Austro-Hungarian ranks. On the whole, it might be expected that both in Russia and in Italy the effort would be at least equal to that of 1916. France and England were doing what they could to help both countries, especially the former, by supplying them with arms and equipment. In Macedonia also, the French were about to increase their contingent considerably, and were hopeful of persuading Great Britain and Italy to do the same. If this were done, it was probable that the Allied Armies in Macedonia also would play a larger part in 1917 than in the past year. Here, however, we shall see that there was to be the one serious difference of opinion in military circles as to next year's programme, and that General Joffre was to find himself in opposition to the General Staffs of Great Britain and Italy.

With regard to the Egyptian theatre, the British were now approaching El Arish, less than thirty miles from the Palestine frontier at Rafah, and thus about to quit the shifting sands of the Sinai Desert for firm ground. So far, an invasion of Palestine had not been decided upon. All that had, in fact, been settled was that El Arish should be occupied as soon as possible, and an endeavour made to harass the Turks in Palestine by means of mobile columns. In Mesopotamia, on the other hand, preparations were already well advanced for the offensive known as the Battle of Kut, which led to the capture of Baghdad. Every blow against any member of the hostile Coalition was valuable, but the repercussion of that about to be delivered in this far-off theatre could not affect the European situation for a long time to come, probably not seriously ever.

Such were the spirit, the ideas and the atmosphere reflected in the memorandum drawn up for the Chantilly Conference by the Section des T.O.E. of the General Staff of the French Armies.¹ Having pointed out that the Allies had on the Western Front a total of 168 divisions² against 129 German, and that there was a somewhat similar preponderance in their favour in almost all the other theatres of war; having laid it down as an axiom that France and Belgium constituted "the principal front"; the memorandum turned to future plans. Its conclusions were as follows: the results of the offensives of 1916 had been important, but not decisive; to complete the work then begun the Allies must persevere in the path they had hitherto followed; during the winter, while developing their material resources and carrying out the training of their troops, they must continue the operations actually in progress; in the spring of 1917 they should seek a decision by a renewal of co-ordinated offensives, to which the maximum strengths would be directed. On these lines they were asked to tabulate their plans and as far as possible fix the dates of their attacks.

The time of the Conference was largely taken up by discussion of plans and prospects in theatres of war other than France and Belgium. This was neither unexpected nor regrettable. Generals Joffre and Haig were in constant communication and could see each other at almost any moment. There was no need for them to go into their plans in detail in the presence of the comparatively junior representatives of Serbia, Rumania and Japan. As will presently appear, they had long been in consultation on the subject, and had made considerable headway in it. Actually, the only question directly affecting the Western Front which arose at the Conference was how early the Allied Armies should be prepared to begin their offensive in that theatre. Sir Douglas Haig, for his part, stated that while

¹ General Joffre was Commander-in-Chief of all the French Armies, and his General Staff, therefore, exercised many of the functions belonging, as a rule, to a Ministry of War. Under a Chief of the General Staff, General de Castelnau, there worked two *Major-Généraux*—the usual term for the Chief of the General Staff—one of whom, General Pellé, was in charge of the Section des Théâtres d'Opérations Extérieures or T.O.E.

² French, 107; British, 56; Belgians, 6. In this figure, the British 60th Division (2/2nd London), moving to Salonika, was deducted. Two French divisions, under orders for the same destination, were included in the French total, but apparently the 16th Colonial, which was already on the move, was deducted. The Belgian divisions were double the strength in infantry of most of the French and German.

he would, if necessary, be able to launch attacks of a certain importance by the 1st February, he would prefer to wait until about the 1st May, by which date the British Armies would be able to put forth their maximum effort. It was decided, upon the proposition of the French Commander-in-Chief, that the Armies of the Entente should be prepared to launch their offensives by the first fortnight of February ; if, however, the pressure maintained until then appeared to have prevented the enemy from regaining the initiative, the Allies might permit themselves to wait longer and select the moment most favourable to themselves.

The discussion regarding the other theatres of war did not lead to any definite conclusion as to Macedonia. The Italian, Russian and Serbian representatives, and in less degree the French, considered this theatre of great importance. The Italians had given a provisional promise to reinforce the Allied Armies there to the extent of three divisions, but were now nervous of the enemy's intentions in Italy and fearful of a great offensive launched through Switzerland. The Serbians, naturally anxious to recover their own country and confident that a really powerful offensive in Macedonia would produce great if not decisive results, wanted reinforcements. The Russians and Rumanians were eager that Bulgaria should be put out of action by an attack from the south co-ordinated with their own efforts on the Danube. Speaking for the British General Staff, Sir William Robertson showed himself extremely sceptical of any good coming out of Macedonia, and hostile to any increased commitments by the British in that theatre. He insisted upon the difficulties of maritime communications in the Mediterranean, which he declared that none of the other Allies really understood. Even the two divisions promised to bring the British strength in Macedonia up to seven, could only be considered a provisional reinforcement.¹

Leaving the matter of Italian reinforcements in Macedonia in the air, the Conference unanimously agreed to the plans in the French memorandum, and drew up a series of

¹ See "Macedonia" Vol. I., p. 201. At an Inter-Allied Conference at Boulogne on 20th October, Great Britain had promised to give favourable consideration to the despatch of two more divisions. She had immediately afterwards, on the 24th, definitely promised to send one, which was now on its way to Salonika. She never sent the second ; nor did Italy send any of her three. The situation in the Near East was very greatly changed by the downfall of Rumania before the end of 1916.

resolutions in which adherence to them was definitely embodied.¹

It was a useful two days' work. It is not fantastic to suppose that but for the gradual defection of Russia and the removal of the conduct of operations in France from the hands of the inspirer of those plans, the Great War could have been ended in 1917.

THE ALLIED FORCES IN EARLY 1917

At the date of the Chantilly Conference, the British force in France and Belgium was divided into five Armies, numbered First to Fifth, containing 56 infantry divisions. It was hoped to increase this number in early 1917 to 65,² including two Portuguese divisions.³ There were five cavalry divisions.⁴ The total strength, all ranks and arms, was just over a million and a half, without taking into account the projected reinforcements.

The most important change since the opening of the Battles of the Somme was the very large increase in the heavy artillery. This now consisted of 1,157 heavy guns and howitzers as against 761 in July, and it was estimated that by the end of March 1917 it would be more than double the latter figure. The improvement in the situation would be rather greater than appears on paper, because the antiquated 4·7-inch gun, of which about eighty were in use, was being gradually exchanged for the 60-pdr. as the tubes wore out. The increase in the supply of ammunition was proportionally much greater; how much, a comparison of receipts for all calibres of heavy artillery during the last quarter before the Battles of the Somme, 31st March to 30th June, and during the last quarter of 1916 will show.

¹ These resolutions are given in Appendix 1.

² The reinforcements were to consist of the 42nd (1st East Lancashire) from Egypt; five 2nd Line Territorial Force divisions, the 57th (2nd West Lancashire), 58th (2/1st London), 59th (2nd North Midland), 62nd (2nd West Riding), 66th (2nd East Lancashire) from the United Kingdom; and the 5th Canadian from the United Kingdom. All the British divisions had arrived by the end of February 1917. The 5th Canadian Division was, however, maintained in England as a draft-finding division and eventually broken up in 1918.

³ The relations between Portugal and Germany had been strained since October 1914, when German forces had entered Angola, but the formal declaration of war by Germany had not taken place until 9th March 1916. The first Portuguese troops landed early in January 1917.

⁴ On 25th/26th November 1916 the titles of the 1st and 2nd Indian Cavalry Divisions were changed to 4th and 5th Cavalry Divisions respectively.

In the former trimester the figure was 706,222 rounds ; in the latter 2,841,555. That for the second quarter of 1917, the period of the Battles of Arras and of Messines and of preparations for the Battles of Ypres, was to exceed five million.

The field artillery had increased only very little more than proportionally to the increase in the number of divisions. An important reorganization had just been taken in hand so as to render it more fluid and to obviate as far as possible the frequent withdrawal of field artillery from its own division, which was made necessary by the fact that any division engaged in operations of trench warfare required considerable extra field-artillery support. Broadly speaking, one-fourth of the field artillery was to be withdrawn from each division, the resultant surplus being formed into "Army Field Artillery Brigades", which might be placed at the disposal of Army commanders as required. Instead of consisting of three or four brigades containing eight 6-gun 18-pdr. batteries and three to four 4-gun 4.5-inch howitzer batteries, each divisional artillery was now to consist of two brigades containing six 6-gun 18-pdr. batteries and two 6-gun 4.5-inch howitzer batteries. The Army field artillery brigades were to be similarly constituted, but in some cases, owing to shortage of 4.5-inch howitzer batteries, they were allotted a fourth 18-pdr. battery instead. The field artillery of the Dominions, which at this time still consisted of 4-gun batteries, was reorganized in the same manner. The supply of field artillery ammunition was increased almost to the same extent as that of heavy. Yet, though there was never in 1917 the enforced parsimony which marked the early stages of the Somme, it was seldom possible to plan an artillery operation without careful regard to ammunition supply, as was the case in 1918. Even when this problem did not obtrude itself, that of the wear of gun-tubes was present.

Frequent allusion to the changes in artillery tactics was made in the volumes dealing with the Battles of the Somme and will be made in the course of this volume. It may be said that the most important was founded upon the increase in guns and ammunition. There was a growing tendency to deepen the covering fire, whether moving or stationary, and, for a barrage representing a wall, to substitute a barrage which might be better described as a zone of fire.

Infantry tactics had not greatly altered. Dispositions were influenced by the nature of the ground, the breadth of No Man's Land, and other considerations; but the normal formation of a company in the attack was in two waves, on a frontage of 200 yards, each wave consisting of two platoons side by side in two lines: fifteen to twenty-five yards between lines and fifty to one hundred yards between waves. Each platoon advanced with its sections of riflemen and bombers in the first line, its rifle-bombing and Lewis-gun sections in the second. A line of moppers-up commonly followed the first wave. A battalion generally carried out its attack with two companies side by side in this formation, followed by the other two in support. The formation was rather more rigid than that practised by the French, whose moppers-up and second wave commonly moved in a line of small columns. The chief weakness of the British infantry tactics, however, lay in the fact that there was not sufficient differentiation between formations for attacking an unbroken front and those assumed in the more open type of warfare following a preliminary success. In the former case the rigid linear formation had its merits, because the essential to success was that the assault should reach the hostile trench simultaneously all along the front, close behind the barrage, and so quickly that the enemy had not time to man his parapet. In the latter case, however, looser formations—small groups or columns—would have lessened the casualties and provided a far more difficult problem for the defence to solve.

The new weapon, the tank, was still important by reason rather of promise than of performance and still in the experimental stage. There were 70 Mark I. tanks in France, but it was hoped that there would be little need to employ them. An improved model, Mark II., was to be supplied at once, 50 being promised in January. From February to May, Mark IV.'s were to be available at the rate of twenty a week; actually this type did not arrive until after the Battles of Arras in April and May.¹

The expansion of the Royal Flying Corps had also been considerable. On the 16th November there were 36 squadrons in France, against 28 on the 1st July. This increase would have been greater but for the German aerial offensive by means of Zeppelins against England, as a result of which 12 squadrons, totalling 110 machines, were retained at home. Nor did the formation of new

¹ The Mark III. was experimental and was never supplied.

squadrons reach the figure hoped for, though there were fifty in the field when the Arras offensive began in April 1917.¹

Many of the changes which took place were gradual, and it is not always easy to assign to their initiation a definite date or even period. There were, however, certain developments which may be said to belong to the first part of 1917.

One of the most important was the scientific study of the weather. A meteorological office had been set up at G.H.Q. in June 1915, and a Meteorological Section, with a regular establishment including an officer at the headquarters of each Army, had been formed in September of that year. Its early function was mainly prediction of the direction of wind as an aid to the Royal Flying Corps and to give warning of conditions favourable to the discharge of gas by the enemy.²

In the course of the Battle of the Somme the section, under the direction of Major E. Gold, began to carry out valuable work for the artillery. In the telegraphic messages issued twice or thrice daily there were now included air temperatures and the velocity and direction of the wind at various altitudes—all three factors of great importance in view of the accuracy of fire which the conditions of trench warfare demanded. Closer liaison was also established with the French Meteorological Section, with which there was a regular exchange of telegraphic reports. In January 1917 G.H.Q. circulated instructions, which were in great demand, for calculating the corrections in the range necessitated by wind, temperature and barometric pressure.³

The dissemination of such news marks a stage in the improvement of gunnery. It was particularly valuable in establishing an 18-pdr. creeping barrage which it was desired should start as close as possible to the line held by the infantry. Thenceforward "Meteor's" wires were

¹ For the number of squadrons in France in November 1916 and April 1917, see "The War in the Air", Vol. III., p. 285; for the number in July 1916, Vol. II., Appendix IV.; for the number at home, Vol. III., p. 244.

² See "1915" Vol. II., p. 168.

³ The effect of these factors upon the flight of a shell is no simple matter, because the shell travels through various layers of the atmosphere in which conditions may vary considerably, and range makes an enormous difference to trajectory. Thus—not to go into detail—an 18-pdr. shell at short range rises only about 200 feet, whereas at a range of 7,000 yards it rises over 2,000 feet.

looked upon by the artillery group commander as indispensable.

Improvements were also made, partly as a result of technical developments in wireless telegraphy and partly by better organization, in the co-operation of aircraft with artillery. Twice as many aircraft as a year earlier were now enabled to range artillery with wireless on any given length of front without a clashing of the calls. Intelligence sections were set up at the headquarters of each corps squadron of the R.F.C., to circulate with the least possible delay information requiring immediate action, to mark air photographs, and on occasion to issue sketch maps illustrating them. Another development of the Intelligence Corps was the appointment of an intelligence officer to the staff of each division. This officer was given preliminary training in the interpretation of photographs and in the examination of prisoners.¹ He was required to have sufficient knowledge of German to carry out the latter task, though it is doubtful whether, on the average, his ability as a linguist equalled that of his "opposite number" on the German side.²

From an early period of the War efforts had been made to encourage sniping, in which the Germans had enjoyed at the outset a distinct advantage. It had been found that successful sniping by the enemy had an effect on the morale of the battalions who suffered from it altogether disproportionate to the number of casualties caused, though this was sometimes considerable. The issue of telescopic sights and, later, the establishment of Army schools of sniping, under the direction of musketry experts from Bisley and experienced big-game shots, restored the balance. The best of the British snipers, in fact, developed an individuality and inventiveness superior to that of their opponents.

The problem of man-power was always difficult, even apart from the heavy wastage of warfare. As the Army expanded, fresh tasks were always being found in the

¹ An apparatus which enabled any point on a photograph to be accurately described was designed by Captain Hon. H. W. Gough, Irish Guards, and brought into general use. It consisted of a transparent semi-circular protractor with a movable arm, which determined the position of the point by angle and radius-vector. All negatives were henceforth marked with a cross as well as with the north point in order to form a base for the protractor. The method was far more accurate than the old one of co-ordinating from the left-hand bottom corner, which did not allow for the variation of the angles of prints off the same negative.

² These attachments really come outside the scope of this volume, as the authorization for them was not issued until 30th May.

rearward zone and at the bases requiring units and personnel of all types, from the most highly trained technicians to manual labourers. Such units had to be provided with telephonists, clerks, orderlies, and cooks, and generally with transport personnel. The establishment of the Transportation Directorate with its programme for the expansion of means of communication, largely increased the demands for labour. In the forward zone also there was a continuously increasing drain, almost entirely on the infantry, for administrative tasks. Efforts were constantly made, without much success, to cut down excessive establishments and abolish those which were unauthorized. Some relief was afforded by the formation of divisional and area employment companies from men of low physical categories, so that fit men could be returned to their battalions. The most important economies in front and rear were the substitution of Indian for white personnel in the divisional ammunition columns and that of coloured for white labour on the Lines of Communication.

Owing to the high standard of training required, the former was a very slow process. It was on the 6th February 1917 that the Army Council first proposed to the Commander-in-Chief these substitutions, which it was then designed to extend later to the Royal Engineers, the Army Service Corps, and the Royal Army Medical Corps; but it is really only as a project that the question belongs to the history of the year 1917. Sir Douglas Haig undertook to replace about 20,000 men of European blood by Indians, of whom 14,000 would be artillery drivers. The Indian detachments began to arrive before the autumn, but by March 1918 only nineteen divisions had received their Indian personnel, and these had not sent their European personnel to the base. The reorganization was, however, then rapidly completed, and the European drivers released were trained as gunners, constituting an invaluable reinforcement.

On the 4th January 1917 the Commander-in-Chief put forward a demand for coloured labour amounting to 21,000 men. There was already in the country a Cape Coloured Labour Battalion, but the personnel of this unit consisted of enlisted soldiers, not subject to the regulations which had to be applied to civilian coloured labour. The chief sources from which this labour was drawn were China, India, South Africa and Egypt. The Chinese labourers numbered 50,000 before the end of 1917 and 96,000 in

August 1918. This contingent included a certain proportion of skilled artisans and tradesmen ; but manual work at docks, railheads, and depôts, road-making, rail-laying, and in some cases forestry were the main tasks of these coloured labour contingents. The Indians, who were the least perturbed by proximity to the front, carried out some useful work on fortification in 1918. The immobility of the coloured labour, consequent on the fact that in most cases it had to be segregated in special camps, would have prevented its employment on any considerable scale in the forward zone, whatever its morale.

It was decided to employ a proportion of women at the ports, on the Lines of Communication, and at G.H.Q., in replacement of men, owing to the shortage of man-power. The proposal was made to the Commander-in-Chief by the Army Council on the 4th December 1916 and was welcomed by him. The result was the formation of Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps, first called the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps and familiarly known as the "WAACS". The corps in France was administered by the Adjutant-General and was subject to military law ; but it was entirely officered and organized by women. The first party, to staff the Officers' Club at Abbeville, arrived on the 31st March. The work came under five headings : clerical ; cooking, waiting, canteen, and domestic ; motor transport ; storehouses and unskilled labour ; telephone and postal services. The women wore uniform and were enlisted for one year or the duration of the War, whichever might prove the longer term. Approximately 350 officers and 10,000 other ranks served abroad, by far the greater number in France. They carried out their tasks conscientiously, efficiently, and, especially during the bombing of the Abbeville area which took place during the German offensives of 1918, with steady courage. It was a most valuable experiment.

The French forces, divided into three Army Groups, of the East, the Centre and the North, numbered 101 divisions, plus seven Territorial. This figure was to be raised to 104 plus six Territorial by the 1st April. There would be no increase in the number of battalions ; there had, in fact, been a slight decrease between the autumn and winter of 1916, but the armament had been improved. There were seven cavalry divisions. The heavy artillery was still increasing, and 4,970 heavy guns and howitzers were

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counted on by the spring, as against 4,300 in November. It will be observed that in this month the French still had, in proportion to their infantry, a superiority of practically two to one over the British as regards the heavy artillery arm; nearly forty pieces per division against just over twenty. The manufacture of tanks had been taken in hand, and this weapon was to be available for the general offensive of 1917. The French Armies possessed about 1,400 aircraft.¹

The Belgian Army numbered six large divisions, but at the moment it was doubtful whether its standard of training, its equipment, or the strength of its reserves sufficed for more than the defence of a quiet front.

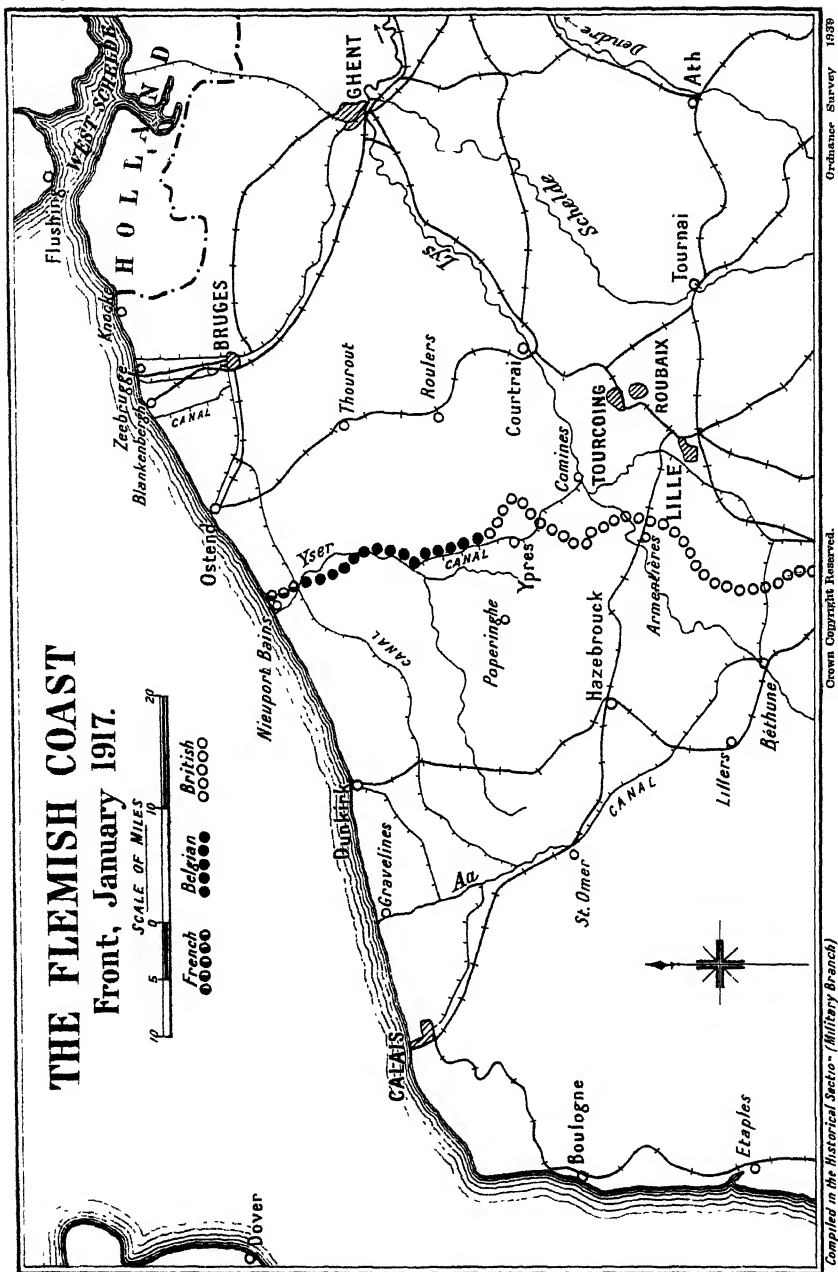
THE ALLIED PLANS ON THE WESTERN FRONT

It has been stated that Generals Joffre and Haig had, when they met at Chantilly, already come to an agreement as to the broad lines of their combined action in 1917. This agreement was embodied in a letter from General Joffre dated the 1st November and General Haig's reply on the 6th. A conversation between Colonel Renouard, Chief of the Third Bureau (Operations), and Br.-General J. H. Davidson, his "opposite number", at British G.H.Q., had already indicated that it was likely to be reached.

The Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies began by stating that his present proposal was not to modify the development of the operations in progress, which it had been decided to continue during the winter. The time had, however, come to consider the plan for 1917. In order to obtain a decision, it would, he considered, be necessary to broaden the front of attack as far as possible; but he had no intention of selecting a new one. He suggested that the battle should be extended to the Oise on the one hand and to Arras on the other, the French attacking between Oise and Somme, and the British between Bapaume and Vimy, a front of from twenty to twenty-five miles each. This would mean that, in the centre, a front of eight miles, from Péronne to about Le Transloy (on the Bapaume—Péronne road), would, in the first instance, be held defensively. If Sir Douglas Haig agreed, the next step would be to determine what change in the Franco-British boundary would be advisable.

Having ascertained, by means of communications

¹ F.O.A. v. (i.), pp. 35-43.



between the two General Staffs, that the reply of General Haig was likely to be favourable, General Joffre obtained the approval of the French Government for his plan.¹ **Sketch 1.**

The British Commander-in-Chief replied, in fact, that he was in general agreement with the views set forth in General Joffre's letter. He saw no objection to leaving a defensive front between the two attacks, except that he considered the importance of the Mont St. Quentin spur (dominating the valleys of the Somme and the Cologne at Péronne) to be such that its capture would probably be necessary for the prosecution of any attack within range of it. On the right of his own offensive front, he remarked, the objectives and line of advance would depend on the progress made during the winter; on the left, the attack would probably be directed against Vimy Ridge.

There was a sting in the tail of General Joffre's letter. Sir Douglas Haig was aware, as a result of previous conversations, that the French were likely to press him to take over from the present British right north of Morval to the Somme at Cléry, a distance of nearly six miles in a straight line, but considerably more following the windings of the front. There would be nothing unreasonable in such a demand, yet Sir Douglas Haig had strong objections to placing his right on the Somme, the chief being that the French communications with the front between Cléry and Bouchavesnes ran across the river. Without, therefore, waiting for General Joffre to put the proposal on paper, he wrote, on the 10th November, that he was willing—on condition that his forces were not further reduced and that the French should first of all capture St. Pierre Vaast Wood—to take over the front of the French V., XXXII. and IX. Corps, as far south as Bouchavesnes, by, at earliest, the 1st January.

This did not content General Joffre. He accepted, perhaps unexpectedly, the new boundary, but not the conditions or the time-table. General Haig then waived his stipulation regarding St. Pierre Vaast and offered to begin the relief between Morval and Sailly Saillisel on or soon after the 1st December. Actually, the British Fourth Army took over the whole front to Bouchavesnes on the 12th of that month. General Joffre had certainly given way to a lesser extent than his British colleague; on the other hand, he had shown moderation, especially in view of the state of public opinion in France, in not demanding

¹ F.O.A. v. (I), p. 63.

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a more considerable extension of the British front. The two men, though the one was often domineering and the other could be stubborn, were never in their dealings with one another afraid to compromise when the higher interests of their respective countries did not appear to be in question. It was this quality of reasonableness which made them, in the main, good collaborators.

At the same time, General Joffre issued instructions for preparations to be made to carry out two secondary operations, one on the Aisne, north-west of Reims, the other in Upper Alsace. Both were to be surprise attacks, commenced after the launch of the main one, dependent upon its success, and profiting by the confusion in the enemy's ranks and the absorption of his reserves, which General Joffre hoped it would cause.¹

There was also a decision to be reached regarding another British operation, the possibility of which was not discussed with General Joffre until after the Chantilly Conference, though it had long been under consideration by the War Office, the Admiralty and British G.H.Q. This was the capture of Ostend and Zeebrugge, a project which, in some form or another, came up every year throughout the War. The proposal originated from the Navy, but, as the Navy made it in the interests of communications across the Channel, it also gravely concerned the Army. As far back as the 3rd January 1915, when the War was but five months old, the then British Commander-in-Chief, Field-Marshal Sir John French, had spoken of such an operation in order to "relieve the Navy of the submarine anxieties and "threats mentioned by the First Lord". In October of the same year, the Admiralty War Staff expressed the view that the use of these ports by the Germans constituted a growing danger to the transport of troops and supplies, and advocated a combined naval and military operation with the object of destroying the base at Ostend or preventing the enemy from making use of it.

There were, in fact, three possible operations to be considered: a surprise attack from the sea and the landing at Ostend of a British force embarked either at Dover or at Calais and Dunkirk; a local advance along the coast-line to enable heavy artillery to reach positions from which it could render Ostend untenable; a general advance from the neighbourhood of Ypres, possibly, but not necessarily, combined with a landing at Ostend.

¹ F.O.A. v. (i.), p. 65.

For various technical reasons which belong to the history of the Flanders Offensive of 1917 Sir Douglas Haig put aside the first two schemes. He was the more inclined to do so because the third, the large-scale operation, would form part of a project which he had kept in view ever since he became Commander-in-Chief: an advance towards the Dutch frontier from the Ypres Salient, aiming at not merely the capture of Ostend but the clearance of the whole Belgian coast. Sketch 2.

The Belgian corridor in the possession of the enemy between the British line at Ypres and the Dutch frontier east of Bruges was about 88 miles in width, and only two main railway systems passed through it to the coast. A comparatively shallow British advance, bringing the railway line between Roulers and Thourout within effective range of heavy artillery, would leave the Germans only the railways through Ghent to Bruges. An advance of about twenty miles, enabling continuous fire to be maintained upon the railway junction of Bruges, must bring about not only the evacuation of Zeebrugge and of the whole Belgian coast, but probably that of all western Belgium, a first-class military, naval, economic and moral disaster to the enemy.

General Sir William Robertson was equally convinced of the importance of such an operation. It was after a meeting in his room at the War Office, held on the 22nd November 1916, and attended by, among others, Sir Douglas Haig, Admiral Sir Henry Jackson, First Sea Lord, and Vice-Admiral Sir Reginald Bacon, that it was decided to address to General Joffre a letter urging that it should be given a place in the general plan for the year 1917. This letter was sent to the French Commander-in-Chief on the 1st December.

General Joffre's reply on the 8th showed him to be in complete agreement with these views, and contained an outline scheme of operations. He suggested a powerful Anglo-Belgian offensive against the line Roulers—Thourout, to be launched several weeks after the beginning of the main Allied offensives already agreed upon; followed ten days later by a French attack along the coast combined with a naval attack on the coast batteries; followed two or three days later by a landing of five divisions.

This proposal had a general likeness to the British plan, which had already been formulated, but with two important differences. First of all, the British plan was to defeat the enemy in the Ypres Salient, and to attempt no landing

operations unless the Ypres offensive were entirely successful. On the other hand, General Joffre, though he assigned the distant objective of Roulers—Thourout to this offensive, looked upon it mainly as a method of containing the German reserves, and suggested that even if it was successful only to a small degree the landing should still be attempted. In the second place, the French proposition was for the landing of five divisions, whereas G.H.Q. gravely doubted whether a disembarkation on that scale was within the bounds of possibility.

The Admiralty considered that where General Joffre's plan differed from that of G.H.Q. the latter should be followed, and that two divisions represented the maximum force that could be disembarked. Sir Reginald Bacon stated that it would take him four months to complete his preparations.

This scheme, now definitely included in the plan of operations for the coming year, was the origin of the Flanders Offensive of 1917. It emanated in the first place from the British Admiralty, whose object was to protect communications in the Channel from attacks by submarines and, in lesser degree, destroyers, based on Ostend and Zeebrugge. It was taken up by the British War Office and G.H.Q. in France, first, because they desired to assist the Admiralty in a matter so vital to the British forces in France and Belgium, and, secondly, because they desired, for military reasons, to drive the enemy from the Belgian coast. It was given the approval and backing of General Joffre because he had a vision broad enough to enable him to realize the force of the British contentions, though the question did not directly affect his own Armies.

We shall see that at a later stage the operations took on a new aspect, becoming an instrument for exercising pressure on the enemy at a time when it was of the highest importance that he should not be left free to attack the French.

POLITICAL AND MORAL FACTORS

Though popular opinion and spirit are not easy to estimate with precision, it will probably be accepted that of all the nations seriously engaged in the Great War Great Britain was at this time the least exhausted materially and morally. If we substitute "British Empire" for "Great Britain", there will be even less hesitation in endorsing this statement. The British military effort had been a

comparatively small one in the earlier stages of the War, and in consequence the losses in man-power during the first two years had been comparatively light so far as quantity went, though woefully large in quality. The losses on the Somme had been very serious, but the Army was still expanding, and, as we have seen, was being more richly dowered with offensive weapons. The introduction of compulsory service, a brave measure which cut across national traditions, had been accepted without flinching, and had greatly improved the situation as regards man-power, though, as has been mentioned, this was a problem which might at any moment again become acute.¹ The financial situation had caused anxiety to the authorities responsible, but their fears had been proved false by the resilience of the country and the confidence exhibited in the cause of the Entente, which had taken the form of a big loan to Great Britain and France, by the United States. The effect upon the enemy being unknown, the results of the Somme had caused disappointment in political circles and in the civilian population generally, as well as in the Army, but in no considerable section of the nation was there any slackening of resolution.

The black side of the situation was represented by the increasing shortage of maritime transport tonnage and consequent dependence on neutral shipping; by the total of one million casualties already reached, even though a very large percentage of the wounded had rejoined the colours; by a still-growing expenditure, already up to £5,000,000 a day; by the risk that the blockade of the Central Powers would bring into the field fresh enemies from the neutral States chiefly affected; and above all by a measure of doubt—which had not yet extended to the nation at large, but had touched some of its leaders—whether defence had not so mastered offence that a decisive victory was no longer possible.

Immediately after the Chantilly Conference a memorandum drafted by the Marquess of Lansdowne was circulated to the Cabinet. Lord Lansdowne, who was one of the constructors of the Entente, dwelt upon these considerations with something approaching pessimism. He urged that the nation should be prepared to entertain the peace proposals from outside which were likely to be made that winter, and that the possibilities of inflicting a “knock-out” blow should be carefully reconsidered. This memo-

¹ See “1916” Vol. I., pp. 151-4.

randum, though it did not advocate initiation by Great Britain of negotiations for peace, was probably intended to suggest them. If so, the suggestion was completely rejected by Lord Lansdowne's colleagues.

The strongest feeling both in the political world and in the country was impatience with the higher conduct of the War, and behind that was, not lack of zeal or confidence, but, on the contrary, eagerness to increase our effort. A large proportion of the Press had become hostile to the Ministry, and in this respect there is no doubt that the Press reflected as much as it created public opinion. The manœuvres which led to the break-up of Mr. Asquith's Government and the formation of that of Mr. Lloyd George, who became Prime Minister on the 7th December 1916, were secret, but there was public pressure behind them, and their result was welcomed by the nation at large.

The result had, however, one curious effect. It raised to the leadership of Great Britain, and in large measure to that of the Empire, a statesman who was indeed almost fiercely eager to continue the War and to force a decisive victory, but who was opposed to the plans for 1917 to which the War Office and G.H.Q. in France were already committed by agreement with the French. The British Government had, at Mr. Lloyd George's instigation, made a request that the Military Conference at Chantilly should be postponed for a week in order that it should not have the opportunity of forcing the hands of the political leaders, who had arranged to meet in Paris at the same time. This request had been refused. The consequence was that, though M. Briand, the French Premier, laid it down that the initiative in regard to operations should come from the Governments, not from their General Staffs, the Paris Conference did little more than register the decisions of Chantilly. Mr. Lloyd George, who desired to reinforce the Allied Armies of the East in Macedonia or, in default of them, the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in Egypt, to lend 200 heavy guns to the Italian Armies for the winter, and to divert further resources to the use of the Russian Armies, was powerless to impress his views upon his colleagues and the political leaders of the Allies. Even after he had become Prime Minister he found himself in chains to what he considered a fallacious conception.¹ To free himself from it he would have been compelled to

¹ See "1916" Vol. II., p. 533.

dismiss Sir Douglas Haig. This step he did not venture to take, in view of the general confidence which the Commander-in-Chief inspired, even though the Army had not equal confidence in some of the subordinates whom he had chosen.

In France, if weariness of spirit were more marked than in Great Britain, that was not a matter for wonder. Her losses and sufferings had been far greater. Some of her richest territories were in the hands of the invader, and the immensely destructive engagements in the West, in which until the Battle of the Somme her Armies had played by far the larger part, had been fought almost entirely upon her soil. Such weariness as there was appeared to have affected the politicians more than the civilian population, and the civilian population, especially the mothers and wives of the soldiers, more than the Army. There was, however, an element such as Great Britain, to her good fortune, never had to reckon with, a small but powerful section of opinion which was not merely "pacifist" but in the literal sense "defeatist", that is to say, definitely traitorous. All through 1917, until M. Clemenceau took office as President of the Council in November, a stream of malignant propaganda was injected, especially by means of newspapers, into the veins of the French public. It was perhaps not one man or woman in a thousand that was directly affected by this poison emitted from morally and mentally corrupted sources. Yet, just as the virus from one unsound tooth may gradually affect the strongest and healthiest, so this propaganda indirectly affected in some degree the spirit of the country. When the rough and ready dentist, called in in November, had removed the origin of the poison, the body politic regained its health.

This deliberate campaign of defeatism had not yet done much harm ; it was in the spring and summer of the coming year that its activities were to prove most noxious. Another element of unrest, in its nature healthy and similar to that which has been noted in our own country, was making itself felt. This was a belief that new methods and new men were needed if the War were not to settle down into a groove through which the life-blood of the nation was to be poured away in vain. And if in Great Britain the country was inclined to hold the political leaders responsible for its disappointments, in France criticism was directed rather against the Commander-in-Chief, because he was far more powerful than any British soldier.

Lack of preparation for the defence of Verdun and inadequate returns for heavy losses on the Somme were urged against General Joffre. The defeat of Rumania—who might have been saved had she and Russia hearkened to his excellent and reiterated advice—increased the volume of criticism. He was reproached even for his calm and impassivity, though there had been no reproaches on that score in the days of the Marne. It was said that he had made himself at home in the War, which had become his conception of normal existence. His view that the French Army was overstrained and must hand over more and more of the burden to the British, was misunderstood in political circles, where it seems to have been considered that he was viewing the future with a wearied and pessimistic eye. In these circles also what was considered his arrogance, his refusal to brook the smallest interference or to have converse with any but the President of the Republic, the President of the Council, and the Minister of War, was resented, because in Republican France there was a tradition of access to the Army by politicians not actually members of the Government.

If M. Aristide Briand climbed out of the morass of dissatisfaction and left General Joffre to sink in it, it is only fair to say that he made an attempt to pull him out. He sincerely desired to retain his services, recognizing that the remarkable degree of unity among all the Allies which had been attained in 1916 was almost entirely his work.

As early as the 16th June 1916, the President of the Council had been forced to promise the Chamber of Deputies in secret session that he would carry out certain military reforms, and in particular restrict the powers of the Commander-in-Chief.¹ He had not done so while the Battles of the Somme were in progress. Now, after a further secret session of the Chamber, he was called upon to fulfil his pledge. At the same time he found a soldier who would, he hoped, not supersede General Joffre so much as supplement him. France and her Allies would thus retain the counsel, experience, prestige and co-ordinating ability of General Joffre while acquiring a new fighting arm.

M. Briand handed in his resignation to the President on the 8th December, the day after the secret session, and was charged by him to form a new Cabinet. This he did on a narrower and stronger basis, especially fortifying his

¹ F.O.A. v. (i.), p. 147.

position—as he thought—by bringing to his side the brilliant and popular military pro-consul, General Lyautey, as Minister of War. He also formed for the conduct of the War, a “Comité de Guerre”, almost exactly corresponding to the “War Cabinet” created by Mr. Lloyd George only three days earlier—on the 9th December—except that it was presided over by the head of the State, the President of the French Republic. He then, on the 13th, nominated General Joffre “technical Adviser” to the Government, with the right to take part in the deliberations of the War Committee, and appointed as his successor as Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North and North-East—but not of the “French Armies”—General Nivelle.¹

General Joffre still remained in name “Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies”, and accordingly made an effort to define his double rôle, as that and as “technical Adviser”. He requested that General Nivelle in France and General Sarraill in Macedonia should be placed under his orders, and that he should continue to co-ordinate the operations of the French Armies with those of the Allies. A formula was produced on the 18th which limited his rôle to that of technical adviser and agent for the transmission of the decisions or suggestions of these two commanders to the chiefs of Missions to the Allies. To this he made no serious objection, not desiring to embarrass the Government and trusting that in practice these restricted powers would suffice. However, the Government had now to meet a fresh parliamentary assault, from which they could free themselves only by still further sacrificing him. Accordingly, a fresh formula was put forward on the 21st, which reinforced the autonomy of General Nivelle by specifying that there should be direct liaison between him and the Government, and also between him and the British and Belgian Armies. General Joffre was thus Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies without any powers of command, a farcical position. On the 26th, he tendered his resignation to the Minister of War, who accepted it. On the same day, the President of the Republic recreated in his favour the ancient dignity, long in suspense and which he had the honour to restore, of Marshal of France.

So a new planet swam into the ken of the military world. General Robert Nivelle was not young in years,

¹ This paragraph and that which follows are mainly based upon F.O.A. v. (i.), pp. 151-9. The decree authorizing the appointment of Nivelle was dated the 12th.

having just passed his sixtieth birthday, but at the outbreak of war he had been only a senior colonel, commanding the artillery of the VII. Corps. His rise had been rapid, perhaps too rapid to allow him time to complete the military education which all commanders had in some respects to begin all over again in the circumstances of the Western Front. There had, however, been no room for two opinions as to his outstanding mental and moral qualities; and he had distinguished himself in each grade. Yet even now he was a junior Army commander, promoted over the heads of the three commanders of Groups of Armies, Generals Foch, Pétain and Franchet d'Espérey, as well as of General de Castelnau, who had held that position in 1915.

The appointment of General Nivelle may, in fact, be said to have been based on a single victory as an Army commander at Verdun, though he had had a previous success there as a corps commander. On the 24th October 1916, General Nivelle's Second Army had launched an attack, conducted by General Mangin, north-east of Verdun on a front of $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles, the most distant objective being nearly two miles behind the enemy's front. That objective was Fort Douaumont, which was not only of great tactical importance but also precious to the Germans as the symbol of all they had endured at Verdun. Though the enemy, having closed down his offensive, had moved a proportion of his heavy artillery to the Somme and thinned out his front, the line was still strongly held. The assault, carefully prepared, powerfully supported by artillery, and carried out by the French infantry with great dash and confidence, was a complete success. General Nivelle was able to declare that within a few hours his troops had captured at one blow ground, covered with obstacles and with fortifications, which the enemy had taken eight months to seize, bit by bit, at the cost of tremendous efforts and sacrifices. Fort Vaux fell soon afterwards, and the total of prisoners then reached 6,000.

It was actually after his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North and North-East, but while General Joffre still remained Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies, that General Nivelle carried out another and even more important operation at Verdun. This attack had, however, long been prepared, having been deferred until the 15th December largely in order to create a reserve of ammunition by husbanding the normal daily

allowance. The objective was now the French second position lost on the 24th February, on a frontage of six miles with a maximum depth of nearly two, and included Bezonvaux, Côte 378, and the notorious Côte de Poivre. The position was held by five German divisions.¹ This time the attack was carried out by four French divisions, grouped as before under Nivelle's resolute and trusted lieutenant, General Mangin. The assault was a complete success, except that Bezonvaux was not taken until the next morning. The captures exceeded 11,000. It was notable that the weather conditions had been very bad, that machine-gun detachments in shell craters were up to their waists in water, that the mud had reached the consistency of soft soap, and that great numbers of the troops on both sides suffered from "trench feet".

This was indeed a remarkable first offering from "the new man with the new method". It has been suggested that this new method was only a return to the ideas of the "Grandmaison School"; but that is not the case. On the contrary, General Nivelle was first and foremost an artilleryman, and his theory, as formulated at Verdun, started from the ground-work of powerful and scientifically handled artillery support. What he considered necessary, what he claimed to have shown at Verdun that he could accomplish, was to overwhelm the defences with a tremendous bombardment followed by a creeping barrage of unusual depth, and then to capture in one day the whole system up to and including the line of the enemy's batteries. It was only by such a blow that a real break-through could be effected. Provided that surprise were assured and that the strongest German positions were avoided, this could, he averred, be done anywhere.

We do not propose to go very deeply into the question whether General Nivelle had or had not found the key to unlock the gate of trench warfare, because the matter was, as will appear, not fairly tried. There are, however, one or two considerations which seem to have been overlooked by him and his entourage. In the first place, it is never certain that what can be done on a front of $3\frac{1}{2}$ divisions—as in October—or of four—as in December—can always be repeated on one of twenty or more. That "friction"

¹ The Germans state that four of these divisions were fatigued by their experiences either on the Verdun front or on that of the Somme, and that the fifth had received as reinforcements chiefly men aged between 35 and 40. (G.O.A. xi., p. 151.)

spoken of by Clausewitz increases by geometrical, while numbers increase by arithmetical, progression. In the second place, there was no attempt to break through in either of these operations and there was surely a warning to be drawn from the fact that the December attack did not reach all its objectives—that is, those which would have had to be taken in one day if a break-through were to follow—until the second day.

That there was a seed in the ideas of General Nivelle which might, given favourable conditions and good fortune, have brought forth good fruit is probable. As it turned out, favourable conditions were denied him and fortune was persistently unkind. Even so, his assumption that these ideas could be translated into action with almost mathematical certainty was unwarranted and dangerous.

Apart from the prospects of the French Armies themselves, the fall of General Joffre was extremely unfortunate for the Allies. His successor had, in the first place, neither his powers nor his position. Had he possessed them, he would still have lacked his international prestige, being almost unknown outside French military circles. The unity of the Allies, which had been the happiest feature of 1916, and had afforded the best hope for the future, was gravely endangered when Joffre left the scene. That heavy and massive figure had seemed to lack inspiration, though it inspired confidence; only when he was no longer there did the Allies in general realize how much good sense had emanated from him. A void was left by his disappearance that was to be long unfilled. One man at least had been wise before the event. Sir Douglas Haig had gone so far as to represent personally to M. Briand the danger of removing General Joffre.

THE PEACE PROPOSALS OF THE CENTRAL POWERS AND UNRESTRICTED SUBMARINE WARFARE

In the midst of these discussions and manœuvres, the Governments of Germany, Austria-Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria presented to the representatives of the neutral States and of the Holy See accredited to their Courts identic Notes requesting that their willingness to negotiate for peace should be made known to the Governments of the Entente Powers.

No better proof could have been given that the confidence expressed at Chantilly had a considerable measure

of justification. Hindenburg and Ludendorff had actually given up hope of obtaining victory by force of arms. They could not themselves contemplate an offensive; on the other hand, defeat seemed inevitable "if the War lasted".¹ They had therefore to decide upon a policy of defence on land, especially on the Western Front, and at the same time look round for an alternative method of winning the War. There did not appear to be much time to spare. As the Allies knew through the medium of correspondence captured on prisoners, there was for the first time a threat of hunger in Germany. The potato crop had failed; fats were lacking; rolling stock on the railways was wearing out; and there was a general shortage of many essential commodities.²

The only possible method appeared to be "unrestricted" submarine warfare, that is, the sinking without warning of all ships, neutrals included, in previously defined zones about Great Britain, France and Italy, and in the Eastern Mediterranean. The effect upon neutral States of this proceeding was doubtful, but it was not thought that it would bring into the War any nation but the United States of America. That the advocates of the policy contemplated without fear. In the first place, American munition factories were already working at top speed for the Entente, and it was assumed that production could not be increased for a very long time. In the second, though America, if she became a belligerent, would doubtless organize her resources as Great Britain had, she was almost totally unprepared. By the time she was ready the crisis would be over; for the Chief of the Naval Staff positively guaranteed that unrestricted submarine warfare would obtain decisive results against Great Britain within six months.³ "It does not matter", said in effect the supporters of the campaign, "what the United States will be "in a position to do in 1918, because by then we shall "either have triumphed or have fallen."

There was, however, a strong party, headed by the Imperial Chancellor, Dr. von Bethmann Hollweg, which deprecated unrestricted submarine warfare. This party was inclined to back the young Emperor of Austria, who had succeeded the aged Franz Joseph on the 21st November,

¹ Ludendorff i., p. 307.

² G.O.A. xi., p. 481.

³ If unrestricted submarine warfare were begun on 1st February, said Admiral von Holtzendorff, Britain would sue for peace before the world's harvest was available, "that is, before 1st August, even taking into account "a break with America". (G.O.A. xi., p. 465.)

32 UNRESTRICTED SUBMARINE WARFARE

in the initiation of peace proposals. The naval and military authorities made no objection. They were doubtful whether any good would result, but they did not expect harm, provided that the Note did not contain any phrase which could be construed as a confession of weakness. If, as they expected, the offer were refused, the Central Powers would have scored a point and gained an appearance of justification for their submarine campaign. They stipulated, therefore, only that the offer should not be made until the Armies of the Central Powers had gained a great success in Rumania to strengthen the prestige of the four States, and that it should be framed in the bold terms of conscious strength and confidence.

The fall of Bucharest on the 6th December provided the great success, and the Note was presented on the 12th. As for strength and confidence, it positively glowed with them. Germany and her Allies had "given proof of their indestructible strength"; their "unshakable lines" were resisting ceaseless attacks; a continuation of the War could not break their powers of resistance; rather did the situation justify "their hope of fresh successes". Nevertheless, though prepared to fight to the end, they were anxious to "stem the flow of blood" and to bring the horrors of war to an end. They were assured that their proposals would serve as a basis for the restoration of a lasting peace. As to the nature of these proposals, there was not a word.

The Note came at a moment when the President of the United States was actually drawing up one of his own, calling upon the belligerents to state their peace terms.¹ Though the ground appeared to have been cut from under his feet by the German move, President Wilson did not relinquish his intention. On the 18th, he issued Circular Notes, which were in no way associated with the recent overtures of the Central Powers, to the American diplomatic representatives accredited to the belligerent Governments.² He pointed out that the United States Government were deeply interested in the future peace of the world, and suggested an interchange of views on the subject. He was not, he said, proposing peace or even offering mediation;

¹ "Intimate Papers of Colonel House" ii., p. 395.

² There was a very slight verbal difference between that addressed to the American representatives with the Entente Powers and that intended for the Central Powers. The two forms are set out in "Diplomatic Correspondence between the United States and Germany", pp. 284-7.

he was merely proposing that soundings should be taken to determine how near "the haven of peace", for which all mankind was longing, might lie.

The Central Powers were the first to reply, on the 26th,¹ but as they merely accepted the initiative of President Wilson, they did not require much time for reflection. They suggested a direct exchange of views between the belligerents; the work of preventing future wars could only be begun after the end of the present struggle. Once again, they gave no hint of their terms. The truth was, they dared not state them because, as we now know, they were extreme, and were certain to be unacceptable not merely to the Allies but to America.² It must be admitted that they were in a difficult situation, because, had mild terms been put forward, these would have confounded and depressed their own people, who had yet no conception of their dangerous plight. If, however, the Government of the United States, under a President who was at once all-powerful and profoundly pacific, could be drawn into a conference on the subject, there was just a faint hope that they would not be drawn into the War on the side of the Allies.

The Allied Governments had on the 30th December

¹ Except Bulgaria, whose reply was dated the 30th.

² The terms which the Central Powers proposed to offer have long been known, though in somewhat vague form, from a letter of 31st January addressed by the German Ambassador, Count v. Bernstorff, to Colonel House, for the personal information of President Wilson. ("Intimate Papers of Colonel House" ii., p. 434.) They have recently been fully revealed in the Austrian Official History Vol. V., p. 719. The points, it is interesting to observe, numbered fourteen: (1) General restoration of the *status quo ante*; (2) Return of the German Colonies with the exception of those in the Pacific Ocean; (3) Germany receives the Congo Free State or part of it; (4) Germany evacuates France with the exception of the Briey—Longwy Basin; (5) Belgium will be restored, German influence being secured by direct negotiation—if this fails, Liège to be annexed; (6) Strategic improvement of frontier against Italy; (7) Recognition of Congress Poland as a Kingdom; (8) Meridian frontier of the Central Powers (Poland included) against Russia—this means the annexation of Courland and Lithuania to the German Empire; (9) Luxembourg with Briey—Longwy added to it becomes a State of the German Confederation (*Bund*); (10) Montenegro will be divided between Austria-Hungary and Albania; (11) Rectification of the frontier against Rumania; (12) Enlargement of Bulgaria; (13) Restoration of Serbia with due consideration of Bulgarian claims and with rectification of the frontier towards the Austro-Hungarian Empire; (14) Independent Albania under Austro-Hungarian protection. Further consideration of Russia as regards the Dardanelles question, the Capitulations, Greece, Freedom of the Seas, etc.

It is scarcely surprising that these terms did not see the light. It must not be forgotten that they were produced at a period when the Central Powers had little hope of winning the War. What would the terms have been, it may be asked, had they won it in 1918?

replied to the peace offer of the Central Powers that, there being no hope that reparation would be made for wrongs inflicted or that guarantees against future aggression would be given, they were unable to accept the invitation. To the United States, however, they put forward their terms with great frankness. There was some delay, due to the need for consultation, but the reply to the President's Note was delivered on the 10th January. In its course they set out their war-aims, which included the restoration of Belgium, the evacuation of invaded territories, with just reparation, the restitution of territories wrested from the Allies in the past by force or against the will of their populations; the liberation of Italians, Slavs, Rumanians, and Czecho-Slovaks from foreign domination; and the expulsion from Europe of the Ottoman Empire.

These terms, involving as they did the return of Alsace-Lorraine and the break-up of the Austrian Empire, were no more likely to serve even as a basis for discussion than those which the Central Powers had in mind. In any case, however, the German Emperor, unable to resist longer the pressure brought to bear upon him by the triumvirate Hindenburg—Ludendorff—Holtzendorff, had already, on the 9th, issued orders that the unrestricted U-boat campaign should begin on the 1st February, "in full force".¹ The announcement was made on the 31st January. The United States had in the previous spring, on the 18th April 1916, in presenting the case of the S.S. *Sussex*,² definitely stated that a continuance of this form of warfare would involve the severance of relations with the German Empire. She could not go back on her word; nor, indeed, had the President, for all his passionate desire to secure peace and still more to keep his country out of the War, any inclination to do so. On the 3rd February 1917, Mr. Robert Lansing, the Secretary of State, informed the German Ambassador that the moment had come and that his passports would be delivered to him.³

President Wilson, buoying himself up with the hope

¹ The steps leading to this order are given fully in "Naval Operations", iv., pp. 266-71. The arrogance with which the naval and military authorities overbore the arguments of the Government is revealed in Chapter XI. of G.O.A. xi.

² A British passenger ship torpedoed without warning and with considerable loss of life in the Channel on 24th March. There were American citizens aboard, although it so happened that no American lives were lost.

³ "Diplomatic Correspondence between the United States and "Germany", p. 303.

that "it would suffice to assert our neutral rights with arms, our right to use the seas against unlawful interference",¹ did not declare war on Germany for another two months. That hope was found to be illusory; there was no place for armed neutrality. Apart from attacks by submarines on American vessels, the notorious "Zimmermann telegram", proposing an alliance with Mexico against the United States, which had been published in the Press on the 1st March, had infuriated the country.² On the 2nd April the President appeared before Congress to demand the declaration that a state of war existed between the United States and Germany. The formal proclamation to that effect was issued on the 6th.

The account of these open and official negotiations has led us far into the year 1917. It will therefore not be out of place to mention the simultaneous secret attempt of the Emperor of Austria to make a separate peace with France and Great Britain.

Charles VIII. was genuinely pacific in character and took an objective view of the War which would have been impossible had he reached the thrones of Austria and Hungary before it began. He had, as commander in the field, had every opportunity to observe the failings of the heterogeneous imperial and royal Armies and of their unfitness to withstand a long war. He had recently, during the month of February, increased his own power and weakened the influences in favour of a fight to a finish by assuming the post of Commander-in-Chief, hitherto held by the Archduke Frederick as his representative, and, what was more important, by dismissing the able and determined Chief of the General Staff, Field-Marshal Conrad von Hötzendorf.

His channel of communication with the President of the French Republic was his brother-in-law, Prince Sixte de Bourbon, who was serving in the Belgian Army. On the 24th March 1917, the Emperor handed to Prince Sixte, who had come in secrecy to visit him, a holograph letter requesting that he should convey to M. Poincaré an assurance that he himself would do all in his power to exact from his allies a settlement of France's just claims in Alsace-Lorraine. Belgium, he agreed, should be restored to all her previous possessions, and Serbia, not only that,

¹ "Diplomatic Correspondence between the United States and Germany", p. 319.

² "War Memoirs of Robert Lansing", p. 225.

but provided with "an equitable and natural access to the Adriatic". A long series of negotiations followed, confined to the heads of States and their chief ministers, but in the end a very promising chance of detaching the Austrian Empire from Germany was allowed to slip away. The question of responsibility is a complicated one, but the main cause of the breakdown was the impossibility of satisfying the claims of Italy to Austrian territory for the sake of which she had entered the War.¹

Thus neither the public nor the secret move in favour of peace had any effect on the military situation in the year 1917. The struggle was to continue.

¹ The best account of the affair is given in "Austria's Peace Offer", by G. de Manteyer, which contains facsimiles of important documents.

CHAPTER II

GENERAL NIVELLE, HIS PLANS, AND BRITISH CO-OPERATION

(Map 1; Sketches A, 1)

THE DISCUSSIONS WITH SIR DOUGLAS HAIG

GENERAL NIVELLE paid a visit to General Sir Douglas Haig at Cassel, the headquarters of the British Second Army, on the 20th December. At that date General Joffre was still nominally Commander-in-Chief of the French Armies, but Nivelle already knew that he himself was to be solely responsible for the operations of the French Armies in France.

The British Commander-in-Chief was much taken by his visitor, who appeared to him to be "a most straightforward and soldierly man". That, indeed, was how General Nivelle impressed all who met him at this period. In the course of a conversation which lasted two hours, General Haig learnt of the coming removal of Generals de Castelnau and Foch, and was informed of a very important revision of the plan for the year 1917. He did not condemn the "new method" of a surprise blow to "go right through" in twenty-four hours, reflecting that a change in this respect was possibly now due.¹ The object of the Allies on the Somme had been to relieve the pressure on Verdun and wear out the enemy, with a view to striking a decisive blow elsewhere later on, when his reserves were used up. It might well be that the coming year would afford an opportunity for that.

Next day, the 21st, Sir Douglas Haig received General Nivelle's views in writing. In this letter it was urged that in the offensive of 1917 the Franco-British Armies should attempt to destroy the main body of the enemy's Armies

¹ See p. 7.

on the Western Front: such a result could be attained only by means of a decisive battle, with considerable superiority of numbers, in which all the enemy's available reserves were brought to action. It was therefore necessary, General Nivelle went on, to pin down the greatest possible proportion of the enemy's forces, to break his front in such conditions that immediate advantage could be taken of the rupture, to overcome all his available reserves, and to exploit fully the results of this decisive battle.

For this purpose a "mass of manœuvre" which he estimated at a group of three Armies, totalling 27 divisions, would be necessary, in addition to what forces were required to pin down the enemy and break his front: it was desirable that this mass of manœuvre should be homogeneous, that is, of one nationality.

General Nivelle therefore proposed that the pinning down of the enemy should be carried out on the lines of the operations already planned at Chantilly, by French forces between Oise and Somme, and by British between Bapaume and Arras; then there would be an *attaque brusquée* by French troops on another part of the front, followed by the concentration of the Armies of manœuvre destined to win the decisive battle and carry out the exploitation. In this exploitation the British Armies would participate.

Everything, it will be seen, depended on the mass of manœuvre; but as the front was at present held it was impossible for the French to form a reserve of 27 divisions. For that purpose it would be necessary for the British to relieve the French Armies from their present left at Bouchavesnes to the Amiens—Roye road, a distance of just over twenty miles in a straight line. This, General Nivelle estimated, would absorb seven or eight divisions. In order that his preparations should not be retarded, he requested that the relief should be carried out by the 15th January. The extension of the front would, he observed, to a certain degree absolve the British from continuing the offensive operations which they were to have undertaken during the winter, in accordance with the decisions of the Chantilly Conference. General Nivelle added that the coast operation was, in any case, not to have been carried out till the summer: if his plan failed, it could still be undertaken then: if, however, the great offensive were completely successful, the Germans would certainly evacuate the Belgian coast of their own accord.¹

¹ A translation of General Nivelle's letter is given in Appendix 2.

Here was indeed a radical change in the plan already agreed upon. In the discussions between Generals Joffre and Haig there had been an understanding that the exertions and losses of the French Army should be fully taken into account in the coming campaign, and that the British should assume a greater and increasing part in the offensive. Now the rôle of the British was to be a subsidiary one. However, if the French could undertake so much, it showed that they were less fatigued than was reported, and if victory was to be won, it mattered not who made the breakthrough. General Haig was impressed by his new colleague's personality; he thought well of the scheme, even if, as will appear, he considered that its author's expectation of results was extremely sanguine; and he desired to support it to the best of his powers.

Another change, minor by comparison but quite important, was contained in the suggestion that the British Armies need not continue to the same extent the winter operations planned at Chantilly. As a matter of fact, General Haig set at least as much store by these operations as General Joffre had done, and he had already proved it by displaying greater activity on the Somme front than the French. The successful attacks astride the Ancre launched prior to the Chantilly Conference, had been continued until the 18th November. Since then climatic conditions had been so atrocious that no offensive action had been possible. The British Commander-in-Chief was convinced that the Germans on the Western Front were becoming exhausted, and that it was urgently necessary to keep up the pressure, however great the cost, so as to deny to them the possibility of making a recovery before the spring offensive.¹ If he were to relieve the French on a considerable front, it would be difficult to maintain his grip upon the enemy in this manner. Nevertheless, it will appear that, while the relief was in progress,

¹ As to the effect of continuous pressure, it is of interest to note the remarks of General Ludendorff on that subject after his first experience of the Western Front: "Divisions and other formations had to be thrown in on the Somme front in quicker succession and had to stay in the line longer. The time for recuperation and training in quiet sectors became shorter and shorter. The troops were getting exhausted" (i., p. 278). "The strain during this year had proved too great. The endurance of the troops had been weakened by long spells of defence under the powerful enemy artillery fire and their own losses. We were completely exhausted on the Western Front" (i., p. 292). "We now urgently needed a rest. The Army had been fought to a standstill and was utterly worn out" (i., p. 304).

he did carry out a series of important operations on the Somme front. Owing to the relief, the French cancelled those which they had projected.

There was a good deal of sickness in the British Army, which made General Haig disinclined to take over the whole of the extra front until he knew exactly what reinforcements he might expect and how soon they would come. In addition to the divisions already promised, he was hoping that one or two more would be withdrawn from Salonika. On the 25th December he answered General Nivelle's letter, stating that he agreed in principle with the proposals, and that he would relieve the French as far as the Amiens—St. Quentin road (which crossed the line just west of Villers Carbonnel), beginning on the 1st February ; that is, he would take over, in the first instance, eight miles of front instead of twenty.¹ He had already, on the 23rd, informed General des Vallières, Chief of the French Military Mission, of the principal points in his reply, to be telegraphed to the French High Command, with an intimation that he was referring the matter to his Government. The telegram, differing markedly in tone from the letter which followed, was therefore not in his words but in those of General des Vallières.² Sir Douglas Haig had also sent Br.-General Davidson to Chantilly, on the 24th, with instructions to point out that if the offensive of General Nivelle failed, a demand would be made that the French should, in their turn, relieve sufficient British troops to make possible an offensive north of the Lys.

It can readily be understood that the attitude of General Haig, especially as it appeared to be expressed in the telegram, came as a disagreeable surprise to a commander who believed as absolutely in his own plan as did General Nivelle. Such procrastination, it appeared to him, might entail the loss of the War. Without waiting for the arrival of the letter, and immediately after seeing

¹ This letter is given in Appendix 4.

² A translation is given in Appendix 3. Mr. Lloyd George has published a translation in his *War Memories* (ii., p. 1488) without pointing out that the telegram was composed by the French Mission. The telegram is to be found in the British archives only because a copy of it was sent to London when General Nivelle was having his case presented there. It is morally certain that General Haig never saw it, unless it was shown to him in London.

It may be added that during the Battles of the Somme the General Staff complained of an apparent tendency on the part of General des Vallières to transmit to the French High Command erroneous personal impressions in place of the correct information supplied to him.

Br.-General Davidson, he wrote to the Minister of War,¹ urging that at the coming conference in London pressure should be put upon Mr. Lloyd George and Sir William Robertson to compel Sir Douglas Haig to carry out the relief without delay. This could be done by three methods or a combination of them: extension of the frontages of divisions in line, with regard to which General Nivelle considered that the British showed a certain timidity; a temporary diminution of reserves; or reinforcement by fresh divisions. In any case, he considered that the arrival of the Territorial Force divisions destined for the Western Front should be hastened.

Compliance on the part of the British Government was not altogether easy. In the first place, far from having any intention of withdrawing divisions from Macedonia, the War Cabinet, opposed single-handed by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, was inclined to yield to French pressure to send two more divisions there, in addition to the 60th, which had already gone. Alternatively, it desired to persuade Italy to send the divisions; in which case it was suggested that Sir Douglas Haig should be ordered to lend the Italians a number of heavy guns as compensation.² Secondly, only two more divisions would be ready to proceed to France in January, and possibly two in February.

French Ministers—but not M. Briand, who at that particular moment could not take his eyes off Senate and Chamber any more than a lion-tamer dares to turn his back upon his charges while they leap through the hoops at his command—then came to London for a Conference, held at 10 Downing Street on the 26th and 27th December. Their urgent request for the immediate extension of the British front was sympathetically received by the War Cabinet, which, however, considered that it must consult the British Commander-in-Chief before giving a decision. As regards Salonika, it decided to defer its answer to the French demand.

Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig—raised to that rank by H.M. the King on the 27th December—decided to see

¹ General Lyautey, who had arrived in Paris from Morocco only two days before (F.O.A. vi. (i.), p. 155, footnote), knowing, of course, nothing about the question. Admiral Lacaze had been acting as Minister of War, in addition to holding the office of Minister of Marine, since the reconstitution of the Ministry.

² Actually, the XCIV. and XCV. Heavy Artillery Groups, with 10 four-gun 6-inch howitzer batteries, were sent to Italy from the United Kingdom in mid-April 1917. On 25th July the CI. Heavy Artillery Group, with six six-gun batteries of the same nature, were despatched.

General Nivelle himself, and visited him at Chantilly on the 31st. The conversation was again friendly. Sir Douglas Haig once more stated that he was in agreement with the principles on which the plan was based, which were, in fact, similar to those he had suggested to General Joffre a year earlier for the British operations. He told his colleague that he believed he would be successful, but that it was possible he might not be able to go as far as was anticipated ; if there should be a check, a rapid decision would be required, and every effort must be made to pierce the enemy's line in the north ; in that case, he relied on the French Army to set free by relief enough British divisions to ensure success. To this General Nivelle agreed. As to the relief of the French, Sir Douglas Haig undertook to begin it on the 15th January and complete it to about the Amiens—St. Quentin road early in February ; what he could do after that depended on the number of divisions received. General Nivelle appeared content with that, and Sir Douglas Haig understood him to say that the end of March or the beginning of April would be early enough for the relief to the Amiens—Roye road.

It seems certain that Sir Douglas Haig misunderstood General Nivelle on this point ; if so, it was not the only occasion on which General Nivelle showed himself less downright in a personal interview than on paper. Another misunderstanding occurred shortly afterwards. In a letter of the 2nd January 1917, General Nivelle spoke of the coming battle as being of "*une durée prolongée*". Actually, he was referring to the whole series of operations, which would comprise three phases : the pinning down of the greatest possible proportion of the enemy's reserves ; the rupture of the front by the main group of French Armies ; and the exploitation, in which both British and French Armies would take part with all available resources.¹ Sir Douglas Haig took him to mean that the first two phases might be of "*prolonged duration*", and objected to this conception of his own rôle. The misapprehension had one fortunate result, in that it induced him to open his mind fully to his colleague on this question in a very important letter dated the 6th.

He stated that he had already agreed to launch an attack as desired by General Nivelle, but not to an indefinite

¹ It has not appeared necessary to include this letter in the appendices. For the benefit of the student, it may be mentioned that it is given in F.O.A. v. (1.), Annexes I., p. 631.

continuation of the battle to draw in the enemy's reserves ; it was proposed that during the second phase, the British Armies should continue their offensive while General Nivelle sought a decision elsewhere, but this had been on the understanding that the decisive attack should be launched shortly—in from eight to fourteen days—after the commencement of the first phase, and that the second phase should be of very short duration ; as to the third phase, that of exploitation, Sir Douglas Haig agreed to co-operate “ on the assumption that the previous successes “ have been of such magnitude as will make it reasonably “ certain that by following them up at once we can gain a “ complete victory and, at least, force the enemy to abandon “ the Belgian coast ”.

Then came the passages which throw the fullest light upon the British Commander-in-Chief's conception of the rôle of the British Armies in the campaign of 1917, and of the necessity of clearing the Belgian coast before the summer was out. With regard to this, Sir William Robertson had recently impressed upon him how important the War Cabinet considered such an operation to be, and had asked whether General Nivelle's plans were likely to prevent it.¹

It was, Sir Douglas Haig wrote, essential that the Belgian coast should be cleared that summer ; he hoped that much more than that would be effected ; and *within limits of time* would co-operate to the utmost of his power in the larger plan proposed ; but it must be understood that if he were not satisfied that this plan, as events developed, promised the degree of success necessary to clear the Belgian coast, then, not only could he not continue the battle, but he looked to General Nivelle to fulfil his verbal undertaking to relieve the troops required for the northern offensive.

There was, in fact, in his view, a fourth phase of the operations which must be taken into account in their plans ; the need to carry it out would not, he hoped, arise ; but the clearance of the Belgian coast—a question, in fact, never absent from his mind throughout 1917—was of such importance that it had to be fully provided for before he could finally agree to the proposals : and he requested General Nivelle to consider up to how far north he could relieve the British troops if the need arose.

As to his relief of the French, he adhered to his previous

¹ General Robertson's letter is given in Appendix 5.

statement that he could not take over south of the Amiens—St. Quentin road unless more divisions were sent than had yet been promised.¹

With regard to the date of the offensive, he considered that the Allies should not launch it before they could employ their maximum resources, that is, before the 1st May, and pointed out that this would fit in with the Russian and Italian plans.

In his reply on the 11th, General Nivelle cleared up the misunderstanding about the phrase "*durée prolongée*", and went far towards giving the undertakings which had been asked of him. He took exception to certain phrases in Sir Douglas Haig's letter which seemed to him to imply that the British were at liberty to break off the battle at any moment they chose and leave the French alone at grips with the enemy. He could give no definite promise to relieve the British up to the Ancre or any other particular point if his own offensive failed, because that would depend upon the situation after the battle; but he engaged himself to do all he possibly could in this respect. Sir Douglas Haig was then on leave, and the letter reached him in the country in the small hours of the 13th.

General agreement had thus been established except as to the relief of the French down to the Amiens—Roye road and the date of the offensive. In the meantime, however, the whole scheme had run the risk of being upset at an Inter-Allied Conference held in Rome between the 4th and the 7th January. Here the British Prime Minister, in the name of the British Government, had proposed to lend 250 or 300 British heavy guns to Italy for an offensive on the Carso in the direction of Trieste, and suggested that the French should do the same. M. Briand pointed out that a great offensive took some little time to prepare; it had become, as he aptly put it, "a great industrial operation". What effect, he asked, would this withdrawal of guns have upon the plans of General Nivelle, to which the French were committed and in which they had full confidence? The Italian Commander-in-Chief, General Cadorna, was then called in, and did not prove very enthusiastic about the project. He did not consider that the arrival of the guns could be concealed or that a surprise could be effected with their aid: besides, would not the British want them back for their own spring offensive? Mr. Lloyd George replied that the British guns could

¹ The letter is given in Appendix 7.

probably be left until about May, but General Lyautey promptly pointed out that this would be too late for General Nivelle. Eventually the proposal was diplomatically set aside by a resolution to refer it to the military advisers of the various Governments. A plan drawn up by General Cadorna for the employment of an Allied contingent in Italy was subsequently sent to London. The most important military result of the Conference was the refusal of the British Government to send more divisions to Salonika.

The question of the relief as far as the Amiens—Roye road was still undecided. To settle it another Conference was held in London, on the 15th and 16th January. General Nivelle, with several Staff officers, crossed from France to attend, and Sir Douglas Haig came up from the country. The latter had on the morning of the 15th an interview with the Prime Minister, who compared British methods adversely with those of the French. At 3.15 P.M. there was a short meeting of the War Cabinet, at which Sir Douglas Haig, Sir William Robertson, and Mr. Arthur Balfour, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, were present, and a quarter of an hour later General Nivelle arrived with his Staff, accompanied by M. Paul Cambon, the French Ambassador.¹

No agreement was reached that day, Sir Douglas Haig reiterating that he required four or five more divisions in order to take over to the Amiens—Roye road. If he did so without receiving these reinforcements, in the first place he must reduce the strength of his attack, and in the second, the training of his troops would suffer, a very serious consideration, in view of the large proportion of young, half-trained soldiers in most divisions and of the necessity of imparting to all the tactical lessons learnt in the Somme battles.

On the 16th there was a second meeting. It was finally decided—after some hesitation regarding the risks in case of invasion—that two more divisions should be found for France, bringing the number up to 62; that the British front should be extended to the Amiens—Roye road by the first week in March; and that the offensive should be launched by, at latest, the 1st April, before that date if possible. General Nivelle had therefore obtained what he wanted, with the delay of a fortnight. He had

¹ The War Cabinet consisted of Mr. Lloyd George, Lord Milner, Lord Curzon, Mr. Henderson and Mr. Bonar Law. Mr. Balfour was not a member, but frequently attended.

demanding at the Conference that the relief should be completed by the 15th February, so that the attack could take place at the end of March. With the alteration of that date, the agreement which was then signed was actually a document drawn up by him.¹ He professed himself to be quite satisfied. It is to be noted that he refused to be pinned down by the British Ministers to a date for the offensive; merely replying that he desired to launch it as soon as possible. It seems probable, indeed, that the state of the preparations on his own front was by now causing him some anxiety.²

THE PLAN OF OPERATIONS

General Nivelle, though nominated to the command of the Armies of the North and North-East on the 12th December 1916, had not taken over until the 17th, being detained on the Verdun front by the operation begun there on the 15th. He then installed himself at Chantilly, but reorganized the G.Q.G., General Pont becoming Major-General, or Chief of the Staff. The T.O.E. was withdrawn from General Nivelle's control, and henceforth became part of the Ministry of War.³ He was not permitted to remain long at Chantilly. At the instance of the Government, the G.Q.G. was transferred on the 6th January 1917 to Beauvais, a most inconvenient and costly move, which appears to have been dictated solely by the determination of French politicians that the "Chantilly atmosphere", like the régime of Maréchal Joffre himself, should be abolished.⁴ At the beginning of April there was another move, to Compiègne.

Some time before the settlement with respect to the British relief, General Nivelle had made his arrangements as to the command and distribution of his troops for the coming offensive, and had also issued his preliminary in-

¹ The agreement is given in Appendix 8.

² See Colonel Herbillon : "Le Général Alfred Micheler", p. 127 : "We were far from being ready, and the railway work had hardly been put in hand : material and labour were lacking". Colonel Herbillon states that this was a summary of the notes of General Micheler. Their date is not given, but it must have been shortly after General Micheler received his first instructions from General Nivelle, sent on the 30th December. They are summarized in the following section.

³ See p. 9.

⁴ Herbillon : "Le Général Alfred Micheler", p. 123. Otherwise this section is based, except where otherwise stated, on F.O.A. v. (1.), Chapter VI.

structions. General Franchet d'Espérey was appointed to the command of the Group of Armies of the North, in succession to General Foch, on the 27th December. The successor to General d'Espérey, in command of the Group of Armies of the East, was General de Castelnau; but it was decided that he should represent France on a mission to Russia, in which his British military colleague was to be Lieut.-General Sir H. H. Wilson.¹ General Nivelle, uncertain whether or not the appointment was definite, then broke up the headquarters of the Group of Armies of the East, and took its two Armies, the Seventh and Eighth, directly under his own command. This disposition, however, was again altered on the 17th January 1917, when General Foch was placed in command of the two Armies, constituting for the moment the "Foch Group".² The Group of Armies of the Centre remained under the command of General Pétain. Its sector actually included the front opposite the German positions against which the main attack was to be directed. However, as General Pétain was not enthusiastic about the plan, General Nivelle decided to shift the boundary of his command to the east and bring in a new Group of Armies under the command of General Alfred Micheler, who had distinguished himself on the Somme. General Micheler was not accorded the title of commander of a Group of Armies, but was nominated "Assistant to the Commander-in-Chief with the rank of "Army commander". His command, however, became known a little later as the Group of Armies of Reserve.³

It was to consist of three Armies, the Fifth (General Mazel), which was already on the Aisne front, and the Sixth and Tenth, which were to come from the G.A.N. The headquarters of the Sixth had already been drawn into reserve, but that of the Tenth would not be available until the relief by the British had been completed. General Mangin succeeded General Fayolle, who went to another Army, in command of the Sixth, and General Duchêne took over the Tenth in succession to General Micheler.

It was not until the offensive was over, apparently,

¹ It was possibly in some degree owing to British pressure at the London Conference beginning on 26th December that General de Castelnau was sent to Russia. The British Ministers were very anxious that a general officer of high rank, military skill and experience should be sent.

² F.O.A. v. (i.), p. 313.

³ In future described as G.A.R. Similarly, G.A.N. will stand for Group of Armies of the North; G.A.C., for Group of Armies of the Centre; and G.A.E., for Group of Armies of the East, when that term again comes into employment.

that General Nivelle put on paper the reasons which had led him to choose the fronts of the three attacks: the preliminary French attack between the Oise and the Avre; the preliminary British attack between Bapaume and Arras; and the main French assault between Reims and Vailly on the Aisne.¹ They were certainly cogent.

In the Flanders area, he considered that climate and soil were decisive factors precluding an offensive before the summer. In the British sector, the Bapaume—Arras front was more suitable to an early attack, and good reasons existed in favour of launching it there, such as the preparations already made and the fact that the German front formed a salient.

On the Somme, and between the Avre and the Somme, the situation was that of a "fin de combat"; the battlefield was "usé", and the front was held in strength by the enemy. Between the Avre and the Oise the ground was suitable to an attack, but this front was too narrow to serve as the basis of the main offensive. It would therefore be that of the preliminary French offensive, which would be launched in a direction converging towards the British advance from the Bapaume—Arras front.

Looking eastward, no suitable front was to be found until one reached that of the Aisne and Champagne, which was not, in his view, too far distant to lose the advantage of a convergent operation against the large German salient between Reims and Arras. Between Berry au Bac and Vailly, the French had a wide and deep bridgehead over the Aisne from which to capture the ridge of the Chemin des Dames, the possession of which was vital to forces operating in this region. The general direction of the exploitation after the rupture of the front would be at right angles to that of the Franco-British advance and therefore converging towards it.

With these ends in view, General Nivelle decided, on the 19th December, that the French attacks north of the Oise should be carried out by from twenty to twenty-four divisions; that on the Aisne by an "Army of Rupture" of 15 divisions; and the exploitation on the latter front by a Group of three Armies, including the Army of Rupture, consisting in all of 80 divisions and 7 cavalry divisions. He shortly afterwards modified this plan as regards the

¹ This was in his memorandum for the Commission which, under the presidency of General Brugère, enquired in June into the whole question of the offensive.

main attack. His intention now was to effect the break-through between Reims and Vailly with two Armies, totalling 28 divisions, and to reserve only one Army of 12 divisions and 5 cavalry divisions for the exploitation. This Army, though forming part of the G.A.R., would be at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief. If, however, there were changes in dispositions, General Nivelle, from the very day on which he took over command, adhered to the broad lines of his remarkable conception, which he did not alter even after the German withdrawal of March.

It is impossible to go in detail into the directives issued by General Nivelle, but an exception must be made of his personal and secret instructions to General Micheler on the 30th December. In this letter he explained the general plan, and more precisely the rôle of the G.A.R., at the same time indicating the resources which would be put at its disposal.

The goal was the destruction of the main body of the enemy's forces on the Western Front; in order to attain this end it would be necessary, first, to break through his defensive positions, secondly, to overcome inside the breach all such of his forces as had not been already pinned down elsewhere, and, finally, to push forward the bulk of the attacking forces to his main communications, so as to compel him either to abandon his present positions or to accept battle anew in the most unfavourable circumstances.

In order to pin down the enemy and oblige him to divide his forces, the attack would be launched on three separate fronts, sufficiently far apart, and would be spread out over a certain period of time.

"I have therefore decided to attack, in the first place, "in the area north of the Oise simultaneously with a powerful British offensive on the front between Arras and Bapaume, then to launch an offensive on the front between Reims and the Aisne—Oise canal.

"While I shall not overlook the possibility of exploiting "with the appropriate resources the attack undertaken "north of the Oise (should that succeed in exceptionally "favourable circumstances), my intention is to seek the "break-through on the Aisne front. The mass of manoeuvre "which I shall form for the purpose of debouching beyond "the breach made in the enemy's array will be disposed "in accordance with this decision."

The first task of General Micheler's command, the

G.A.R., would be to break the German front between Reims and the Aisne—Oise canal. The rupture would be effected by means of a violent attack conducted by two Armies with the object of capturing at one blow the positions of the enemy and the whole zone occupied by his artillery; this operation would be followed by the widening of the breach and the entry into line of the third Army; then the left-hand Army would continue its offensive in the direction of Laon and St. Quentin, the right-hand Army would advance northward astride the Aisne to free the Reims—Laon railway, and the Army of Manœuvre would support the attack in the direction of the north and north-west. The ultimate aim of the operation, it was laid down, was a general advance to the north, the direction being a line drawn from Craonne (at the eastern end of the Chemin des Dames) to Guise. The G.A.N. would co-operate by attacking in the direction of La Fère and St Quentin, and the British Armies would continue their offensive on Cambrai and Le Catelet.

General Nivelle then went on to inform General Micheler of the means which would be put at the disposal of the G.A.R. The two leading Armies, the Fifth and Sixth, would each probably consist of 14 divisions, including four in reserve at the disposal of the Commander-in-Chief. The third Army, the Tenth, would in the first place consist of 12 divisions, and, in addition, the employment of five cavalry divisions for the exploitation was to be provided for.

The heavy artillery would consist of 66 groups (each of 3 batteries) of heavy guns and 66 groups of heavy howitzers, a total of approximately 1,584 pieces, all tractor-drawn. In addition, there would be the 39½ foot-artillery batteries (horse-drawn), numbering about 260 pieces, already on the front of the Fifth Army. And, finally, it was arranged that eight batteries of 220-mm. howitzers on platforms should be added. This made a total of about 1,876 heavy pieces, or more than three-eighths of the French heavy artillery on the Western Front.¹

It will be observed that it was in the manner of its execution, not in the zones of attack, that the scheme of General Nivelle differed mainly from that of General Joffre. The latter had decided upon an attack between the Somme

¹ This is the compiler's calculation. It agrees very closely with the approximate figure for heavy artillery actually employed by the G.A.R. on 16th April as given in the F.O.A. v. (i.), Annexe 1763, which is 1,810. Field and mountain artillery amounted to about 2,000 pieces.

and the Oise by the G.A.N., and one between Bapaume and Arras by the British. He had also provided for an offensive on the Aisne, north-west of Reims, but with comparatively restricted resources, and only for the purpose of exploiting the successes gained between Arras and the Oise; and, finally, he had contemplated an offensive in Upper Alsace.¹ The great difference between the two conceptions lay not merely in the fact that the Aisne was, under General Nivelle's scheme, the principal front, but in the nature of the two operations envisaged. General Joffre proposed to "destroy the enemy's capacity for resistance" as a step to the rupture of his line of battle. General Nivelle proposed "to destroy the main body of the enemy" by a battle in the open field. In place of a succession of attacks, there were to be two separate battles: the rupture of the defences, which was to be achieved by special methods in from twenty-four to forty-eight hours, and then the destruction of the enemy's reserves in the open.

THE TRANSPORTATION CRISIS AND THE CALAIS CONFERENCE

By 1916 the growing needs of the British Armies had overburdened the truncated French railways which supplied them, and had strained the whole system of transportation. They had led to demands by the French, at first only for British rolling stock but later for further aid, until they amounted in effect to a request that the British should ultimately supply and manage the entire system necessary to the movement of their own traffic. These needs had led also, in September, to the appointment of Sir Eric Geddes as Director-General of Transportation, with vastly increased resources and a proportionately ambitious programme.² It was, however, one that could only be carried out step by step. Broadly speaking, from the period of the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line, the French gradually passed all responsibility for railways, roads, canals and the personnel and material required for their construction and upkeep in the British area to the British authorities. At the beginning of 1917, however, the British were still dependent upon the French for the provision of trains, and their needs were still increasing.

December 1916 and January 1917 were unlucky months for the transport services. On the 23rd December, the

¹ See p. 20.

² See "1916" Vol. II., p. 548.

steamer *Araby*, which was in tow after an accident, swung across the entrance to Boulogne harbour and grounded, so that the port was closed for almost a month and all shipping destined for it had to be diverted to Dunkirk, Calais, Havre, Rouen and Dieppe.¹ In January there was a long and fierce frost which stopped all canal traffic, followed in February by a thaw which damaged the roads and compelled the French and Belgian Governments to impose restrictions on their use.

Now, in January, as we have seen, a great effort was required to prepare for the coming offensive on the Bapaume—Arras front, and the following month, in addition to these preparations, the British took over the line from the French down to the Amiens—Roye road. The situation was so bad and the prospects so little hopeful that the possibility of the plans for the year being seriously prejudiced had to be taken into account.

For the purpose of the offensive, the most pressing need was the improvement of railway communications with Arras. The town was served by two single lines, one from St. Pol, the other from Doullens. The doubling of these tracks, in the first case as far as Mont St. Eloi, in the second up to Warlincourt, had therefore been put in hand, with other new construction. It was estimated that during the preparations for the offensive, British requirements would be 191 trains a day on the whole front, and would rise slightly after "Zero".² This programme was submitted to the French Director of Railways, and in early February he agreed that it could be fulfilled if the doubling were carried out in time, if the British supplied all the locomotives east of the Canaples—Hazebrouck line, and if the weather were not unfavourable.

It had, however, already become apparent that even if

¹ The ship had grounded in the roads on 21st December. On the 23rd she was floated off by tugs and proceeded under her own steam to anchor behind the breakwater. It was considered very desirable to get her into harbour, as her cargo of oats was urgently required. The attempt was therefore made that day, though she was making water and the westerly wind was freshening. Just before she reached the entrance, the tow ropes parted and she grounded between the piers, soon afterwards breaking her back. She was eventually floated off in two portions on 18th January.

² Including, during the preliminary period, 43½ for supplies, 48 for ammunition, 17 for engineer stores (including gas), 19 for standard-gauge material, and 33½ for light railways and roads. The amounts under these several categories would vary after the launch of the offensive, decreasing in some cases, but, as stated above, the total demands would increase slightly. The final figure was to be 200, exclusive of trains between the ports and depôts.

the conditions were fulfilled it was very doubtful whether the necessary number of trains would be provided. In fact, in the last week of January the railways were in such a state of congestion that restrictions on traffic had to be imposed, and little progress with preparations could be made. On the 24th January, therefore, Sir Douglas Haig wrote to General Nivelle, pointing out that the British were at present importing 150,000 tons a week, that he deemed it necessary to raise this figure to 250,000, that he saw at present little prospect of clearing such a tonnage from the ports, and that if this could not be done, the situation would be grave enough to necessitate the revision of his plans of operation. He suggested a meeting at Beauvais on the 29th. General Nivelle agreed, but in his letter of the 26th stated that he did not see why the transport crisis should lead to any important modifications in the plan of operations, and requested that when they met, the British part in this should also be considered.

Sir Douglas Haig had not yet informed General Nivelle in what manner he intended to carry out his attack between Bapaume and Arras. It so happened, however, that on the very day that the French Commander-in-Chief wrote this letter, the 26th, General des Vallières, Chief of the French Mission at G.H.Q., learnt the details of the plan from the Operations Section. He at once realized that they would not please General Nivelle. In a letter sent off that night, he not only outlined but criticized them. The principal attack to be carried out south of the Scarpe by the Third Army, was, he considered, on too narrow a frontage—about four miles; the subsidiary attacks north of the Scarpe by the Third Army on Fampoux and by the First Army on Vimy Ridge, required more troops than they were worth, especially as the objective was short of the line of the enemy's artillery. He gave it as his opinion that the British were anxious to defer the attack, if possible, to the end of April, and that they were not displeased by the transport crisis from this point of view. Finally, he suggested putting pressure on the British Field-Marshal to modify his plan by first convincing his Staff that modification was necessary.¹

General des Vallières had rightly divined the effect that the plan would have upon General Nivelle. The latter, however, was not yet in a position to impose upon Sir Douglas Haig any particular form of attack, and could

¹ F.O.A. v. (i.), Annexe 524.

only attempt persuasion, while his Operations Bureau did the same with the British Operations Section. The meeting at Beauvais was once again very friendly. With regard to the transport crisis, the two Commanders-in-Chief agreed on a series of measures to ease the congestion on the Nord system, to accelerate the doubling of the railways, and to ensure better port accommodation for the British forces. By these measures, General Nivelle estimated that the tonnage could be progressively raised from 150,000 to 200,000 a week, with which Sir Douglas Haig agreed to make shift. It is known that the British plan of operations was discussed, but that is all, except that Sir Douglas Haig certainly did not give way regarding the attack on Vimy Ridge.

The transport situation did not improve, and at 2.30 A.M. on the 14th February, Sir Douglas Haig sent a telegram on the subject to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. He stated that recent communications from the French were "highly unsatisfactory"; that Sir Eric Geddes considered an early improvement improbable; that General Nivelle was coming to see him on the 16th or 17th; and that it would be advisable to hold a conference, at which the heads of the two Governments and the two Commanders-in-Chief should be present, immediately afterwards, at Boulogne or Dover. He concluded: "In present circumstances, to pursue operations on dates proposed will probably lead to very heavy casualties with inadequate results". Sir William Robertson replied that the War Cabinet fully sympathized with the Field-Marshal and would, unless agreement were reached by the two Commanders-in-Chief when they met, take steps to hold a conference.

However, when General Nivelle arrived at Montreuil on the 16th, all seemed well, and the discussion was in Sir Douglas Haig's view most satisfactory. It was there and then agreed that the attack should not begin until the British requirements on the railways had been met. On the 20th, General Nivelle actually telegraphed to Generals Franchet d'Espérey and Micheler, commanding the G.A.N. and G.A.R. respectively, that the operations need not begin until about the 10th April.¹

This appeared to make a conference on the railway situation unnecessary, but Sir Douglas Haig was informed that one would, nevertheless, be held on the following

¹ F.O.A. v. (i.), p. 221.

Monday, the 26th February. He telegraphed recommending that terms of reference should be drawn up, and that Sir Eric Geddes should attend. He received a document, headed "Questions for Discussion", which stated that the governing factor was that of railways, and that operations in Macedonia would come also under review.

The Conference was held in the station hotel at Calais. The representatives of Great Britain were Mr. Lloyd George, Sir Douglas Haig and General Robertson; those of France, M. Briand, General Lyautey and General Nivelle. There were, in addition, three technical advisers on the transport situation, Major-General Sir Eric Geddes, and, on the French side, M. Claveille, Under-Secretary of State for Transport, and General Ragueneau, head of the Direction de l'Arrière. Sir Douglas Haig had asked for a short preliminary interview with Mr. Lloyd George, but the latter was closeted with M. Briand until the last moment before the Conference assembled.

The railway break-down on the British front was briefly discussed. The French representatives pointed out that the British required considerably more rolling-stock in proportion to their front and their numbers than they themselves. This was true, and it was doubtless the case that the British troops were more liberally supplied with comforts and better housed, fed and clothed than any others; but it was also a fact that they could not requisition for supplies, whereas the French did so, even in the British zone. No decision was reached. It was decided that the "specialists" should continue to study this question, and they were bidden to withdraw, so that the operations might be considered.¹

General Nivelle once more explained his plan. Mr. Lloyd George then remarked that the time had come to speak with the utmost frankness, and that he desired to know what were the disagreements between the Commanders-in-Chief. To this, General Nivelle replied that there was one only: he had requested that the British attack should not extend so far north as Vimy Ridge, but should be on a wider front south of the Scarpe. Sir Douglas Haig explained his reasons for including Vimy Ridge: first, that if he attacked

¹ The Conference was hardly necessary where transportation was concerned. The French afterwards undertook to handle traffic increasing towards the end of March to 200,000 tons from ports and 100,000 locally per week, say 180 trains per diem. On 1st April they would run 200 trains. They were not called on to make their greatest effort till the 8th, and then rather less than the full quota was required.

solely south of the river, he would, after breaking through, be confronted by the "Hindenburg Line", now known to run from south-east of Arras through Bullecourt;¹ secondly, that Vimy Ridge would be of great value as a defensive position. General Lyautey regarded these reasons as sound.²

Mr. Lloyd George now stated that he desired the question of responsibility to be settled, and requested General Nivelle to put on paper the rules which he considered ought to guide the conduct of the two generals. The document was produced by the French representatives after dinner; it had, in fact, been brought with them.³

Briefly, the French proposal was that from the 1st March the French Commander-in-Chief should exercise authority over the British forces in everything connected with the conduct of the operations, especially plans and their execution, strength and boundaries of Armies and distribution of resources of all natures. For this purpose, he was to have at the French G.Q.G. a British Chief of the General Staff and the Quartermaster-General.⁴ This Chief of the General Staff was to be the channel of communication with the British War Office, which he was to keep informed of the situation of the British Armies, and to which he was to transmit the demands of the French Commander-in-Chief concerning their requirements. Questions of discipline and personnel were to remain the province of the British Commander-in-Chief, who would thus be little more than an Adjutant-General.⁵

Sir William Robertson decided that it would be his duty to resign rather than submit to these proposals, and Mr. Lloyd George agreed that the project went too far. After a good deal of discussion, therefore, a new formula was produced, which laid down that the general direction of the coming campaign should be in French hands, but

¹ The Hindenburg Line had by this time been reconnoitred from the air down to north of Le Catelet, with a few gaps. South of that point there were reports as to its situation not yet confirmed from the air.

² Lieut.-General Sir L. E. Kiggell, then C.G.S., states that Sir Douglas Haig was convinced that the Germans would never voluntarily abandon Vimy Ridge. Another reason for his determination to attack it was, therefore, that here at least there was no fear of the operation being a blow struck in the air.

³ The messages from London which led to the Calais Conference are dealt with in the final chapter of this volume, in which there is a general discussion of the lessons of the spring campaign.

⁴ Not, it is to be noted, a Q.M.G., but *the* Q.M.G.

⁵ A translation of the project is given in Appendix 18.

only while it lasted; that the British Commander-in-Chief should conform his plans of operations to the general strategical plans of the French Commander-in-Chief; that prior to the commencement of operations, the British preparations should conform to the views of the French Commander-in-Chief; and that during the course of the operations, the British Commander-in-Chief should conform to the orders of the French Commander-in-Chief, but should have the right of appeal to his own Government and liberty as to the means he employed and the methods of utilizing his troops in the sector allotted to him. This was the document known as the "Calais Agreement", and was signed on the 27th February by Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, General Robertson and General Nivelle, as well as by the Prime Ministers and General Lyautey. The first-named wrote on his own copy: "Signed by me "as a correct statement but not as approving the arrangement".¹

Difficulties were not over, as the very next day, the 28th, Sir Douglas Haig received from General Nivelle a letter, couched in peremptory terms, asking to be informed, not merely of the instructions issued to the Armies, but also of the measures taken by the Army commanders to carry them out. With regard to the British Mission, General Nivelle stated that this must "without any delay" be raised to a status proportional to its new functions, and requested that Lieut.-General Sir Henry Wilson should be placed at its head on his return from Russia. It appeared evident that he was still hankering after the appointment of a "British Chief of the General Staff", as had been suggested in the French "project" at Calais. In any case, his nomination of General Wilson in an official letter was an impropriety.

Sir Douglas Haig protested to the Government regarding the interpretation which General Nivelle put upon the Calais Agreement. He also pointed out the danger that his demands and those of the French Government would grow, and that further powers over the British Armies would be grasped by the reconstitution of the Mission, which would transmit General Nivelle's orders and report direct, over the head of the British Commander-in-Chief, to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. The War Cabinet, now realizing fully for the first time the state of affairs,

¹ This agreement is given in Appendix 19. It is not a translation, having been drawn up in English by the British delegates.

agreed that the application of the Calais Agreement must be more carefully defined.

They had also to consider a complaint, made by General Nivelle through his Government, that the British Commander-in-Chief surrounded his adhesion to the last directive "with the same reticences as formerly", that no detailed plan had yet been received from him, and that he thought more of defence than offence. The German retirement on the Somme which had already begun had, indeed, somewhat disquieted the Field-Marshal as regards its possible effect upon his Flanders front. He had stated that he would have to make arrangements to reinforce it rapidly in case of need by divisions saved from his Fifth Army, now beginning the pursuit of the enemy. He knew that German reserves had appeared in Belgium, and considered that he must now reckon with the possibility of a counter-stroke. The presence of these troops in the north was doubtless a precaution in case Dutch resentment of the renewed submarine campaign should take an active form. The view of General Nivelle, that the enemy was not contemplating an offensive anywhere, was actually correct, but Sir Douglas Haig's anxiety was not unnatural. No British Commander-in-Chief could be insensible to the merest hint of danger to the Channel ports, so vital to the maintenance of the Armies in the field, so quickly reached by a successful hostile thrust from the neighbourhood of Ypres; or, for that matter, any threat to the depôts and the military buildings and works situated between Ypres and the coast. For these reasons, it was deemed necessary to hold still another conference, for which Sir Douglas Haig and General Nivelle crossed to London. There an agreement was drawn up and signed by both on the 13th March.

It was in two parts, the first defining the relations of the two Commanders-in-Chief, and the second the duties of the British Mission—at the head of which the British Government agreed to place General Nivelle's nominee. Briefly, the decisions were as follows:

The French Commander-in-Chief would communicate with the British Army only through the British Commander-in-Chief, but would receive from the latter information as to operation orders issued by him and as to their execution; the British troops in France remained under the orders of their commanders and of the British Commander-in-Chief. The duties of the Mission were to maintain touch between

the two Commanders-in-Chief, though it might be employed by General Nivelle in drawing up instructions which he would normally send to Sir Douglas Haig over his own signature ; it was to keep General Nivelle informed of the situation of the British Armies in France, of the orders issued to them, and of the manner in which operations were developing. It was therefore something less than the General Staff attached to the G.Q.G. which had been fore-shadowed in the original French "project", and at which Sir Douglas Haig believed General Nivelle to have been aiming even after the Calais Conference.¹

The enemy had for some time been withdrawing on the Somme front. From now onwards he was in full retreat to the Hindenburg Line. This retreat was to have an important effect upon the plans of General Nivelle. But, not only was the scheme itself dislocated ; the French Government was crumbling and with it confidence in the Commander-in-Chief. The day after the signature of the agreement in London, the Minister of War, a soldier with little finesse in his dealings with politicians, was shouted down in the Chamber. He at once resigned. With the departure of General Lyautey, the Ministry was doomed ; it had, in fact, only three more days to live. Though its fall did not prevent the execution of General Nivelle's plan, it cost the General-in-Chief the support of the Prime Minister who had selected him for his post, and it brought to the Ministry of War, in the person of M. Painlevé, a man who distrusted his ideas. The British Government had placed their Commander-in-Chief, the greatest Army Britain had ever put into the field, and the contingents of the Dominions, under the orders of a commander who now no longer enjoyed the full confidence of the Government of his own country.

¹ This agreement is given in Appendix 20.

CHAPTER III

THE OPENING OF THE YEAR 1917

(Maps 1, 2 ; Sketch 3)

SIR DOUGLAS HAIG'S INSTRUCTIONS

ON the day after the conclusion of the Inter-Allied Military Conference at Chantilly, the 17th November 1916, Sir Douglas Haig issued to his Army commanders instructions which covered both the policy for the winter and the offensive plans for early 1917. In accordance with his agreement with General Joffre, he intended to harass the enemy by every possible means on the fronts of the British Fourth and Fifth Armies throughout the winter, and at the same time to make preparations for a large-scale offensive: in particular, by the improvement of communications, including construction of roads and railways (with railheads, stations and gun-sidings); and the accumulation of stores required for the extension of such works beyond the present front line.

The Commander-in-Chief laid down that during the winter defences should be strengthened so that they could be lightly held, in order to permit as many formations as possible to be released for training; that, in general, the enemy should be harassed by raids, discharges of gas, and concentrated bombardments; and that on the fronts of the Fourth and Fifth Armies the offensive should be continued to a limited degree, so far as the weather, the condition of the troops, and the requirements of training permitted.

He directed that preparations should be made for a major offensive—that which formed part of General Joffre's scheme—as well as secondary enterprises early in 1917. The major offensive was to be launched between the present right—at that moment at Sailly Saillisel—

and Vimy, any portion of the line subsequently taken over from the French being held defensively. For General Sir Henry Rawlinson's Fourth Army, on the right, it was stated that the objective at the outset of operations would probably be the comparatively close one of Rocquigny, Bapaume and the Bois Loupart. For General Sir Hubert Gough's Fifth Army, only the direction of the attack, Achiet le Grand, was indicated. General Sir Edmund Allenby's Third Army was instructed to prepare an attack between Ficheux ($4\frac{1}{2}$ miles south of Arras) and the Scarpe, handing over its front north of that river to the First Army of General Sir Henry Horne, which was to prepare for the capture of Vimy Ridge. One of the secondary attacks for which provision was to be made was against the Spanbroekmolen spur of the Messines Ridge, on the Second Army front. This operation would have to await its turn, but it was the Commander-in-Chief's intention to supply General Sir Herbert Plumer with resources for the completion of his preparations as soon as those for the main attack were finished. Meanwhile, the Second Army was to be ready to launch, at a month's notice in the spring or summer, a more important offensive with the object of recapturing the Messines—Wytshaete Ridge itself. This, it may be remarked, was a preliminary step necessary to the clearance of the Belgian coast. The front between Vimy and the Lys would probably be purely defensive, but General Horne was to consider the possibility of capturing Aubers Ridge, north of the La Bassée Canal, if required to do so.

These instructions were written whilst General Joffre's plan for 1917 held the stage, and were inspired by its spirit. The relief of the French down to Bouchavesnes, which formed part of the plan, was, as already stated, carried out by the Fourth Army by the 12th December. The advent of General Nivelle, and the decision of Sir Douglas Haig to support the new plan which he advocated, naturally led to a change in arrangements. The British Commander-in-Chief therefore issued, on the 2nd January 1917, fresh personal and secret instructions to the Army commanders, in which he outlined the new situation.

The essence of this was the decision of General Nivelle to withdraw into reserve the maximum possible number of divisions and artillery with a view to the delivery of a decisive attack. In order to give that attack the best chance of success, subsidiary thrusts would be carried out

north of the Oise by the French and by British troops, the latter attacking in the Ancre valley, opposite Arras, and against Vimy Ridge. The object of these operations would be, first, to take advantage of the salient in the German lines west of Bapaume, and, secondly, to pin down the enemy, draw in his reserves, and thus facilitate the task of the main French attack.

With these objects in view, it had been decided to relieve the French troops on the British right as far as the Amiens—St. Quentin road, and to push forward preparations for the offensive as quickly as possible.¹ With regard to the attack, Sir Douglas Haig pointed out that the Fourth Army, which would carry out the relief, would not have troops enough for any serious operations, and could do little more than keep touch with the right of the Fifth Army. That Army was still to attack in the direction of Achiet le Grand ; but it was now stated that its operations were to consist of a succession of advances, each thoroughly prepared and “carried out with due regard to the necessity of economy “of personnel”—a phrase which marked its operations as secondary to those of the Third Army on its left. The first objective of the Third Army would be the high ground of Monchy le Preux ; it was then to turn the German defences south of Arras by a rapid advance in a south-easterly direction towards Croisilles and Bullecourt. Simultaneously, the First Army would capture Vimy Ridge in order to secure the Third Army’s left flank and to gain observation over the Douai plain.²

The relief of the left of the French Third Army by the British Fourth Army down to Genermont, a hamlet about a mile south of the Amiens—St. Quentin road, was completed by the 13th February, the III. Corps, which had previously been in line on the left of the Fourth Army, taking over from the Somme to that point with three divisions. Meanwhile, it will be recalled that at the London Conference on the 16th January the two Commanders-in-Chief had agreed that the relief of the French should be extended down to the Amiens—Roye road, and should be completed by the end of February.³ On the 26th January, Sir Douglas Haig issued instructions for this to be done. Despite the considerable extension of his front, he announced that he had no intention of altering materially

¹ See p. 40. Sir Douglas Haig had not yet agreed to take over any further than the Amiens—St. Quentin road.

² These instructions are given in Appendix 6.

³ See p. 45.

the frontages or scope of the attacks already arranged. The relief would, however, entail a considerable movement of divisions and could not be completed in time for the full plan of operations to be put into effect before the 15th March, by which date he expected his Army commanders to have everything in readiness for the offensive. He pointed out, however, that it might be necessary to undertake an offensive, with as strong forces as could be made available, at any time after the 1st February.

It will be observed that at a time when the French had unfortunately formed the impression that he was hanging back, he was, in his instructions to his subordinates, better than his word. Three weeks earlier he had written to General Nivelle suggesting that the attack should be postponed until about the 1st May, which would allow him to operate with the maximum resources, and would fit in with the Russian and Italian plans.¹ The London Conference and its convention having supervened, he was now ordering the Army commanders to carry out the full programme by the 15th March, and a modified one earlier if necessary, whereas the 1st April had been fixed as the latest possible day. He was therefore showing no disposition to stretch the agreement signed in London to its fullest limits.²

The relief was completed by the 26th February, on which date the British IV. Corps, withdrawn from the Fifth Army sector, took over to the Amiens—Roye road between Andechy and Le Quesnoy. The British Armies now held from that point to Bœsinghe, on the Yser canal, from which point to the sea the front was held by the Belgians, except for a single French division in the coast sector at Nieuport. On the British right was the Fourth Army, between the Amiens—Roye road and Lesbœufs, having in line the IV. Corps (32nd, 35th and 61st Divisions), III. (50th, 1st and 48th), XV. (33rd, 8th and 40th) and XIV. (Guards, 29th³ and 20th). Between Lesbœufs and Gommecourt was the Fifth Army, with the I. Anzac Corps (5th, 4th,³ 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions), II. (2nd, 18th and 63rd), and V. (62nd, 7th, 19th³ and 31st). Between Gommecourt and Ecurie (two miles north of Arras) lay the Third Army, with the XVIII. Corps (46th, 58th and 49th³ Divisions), VII. (30th and 14th), VI. (3rd, 12th and

¹ Appendix 8.

² These instructions are given in Appendix 9.

³ The 29th, 4th Australian, 19th and 49th Divisions were all about to be withdrawn from the line by the extension of the frontages of neighbouring formations.

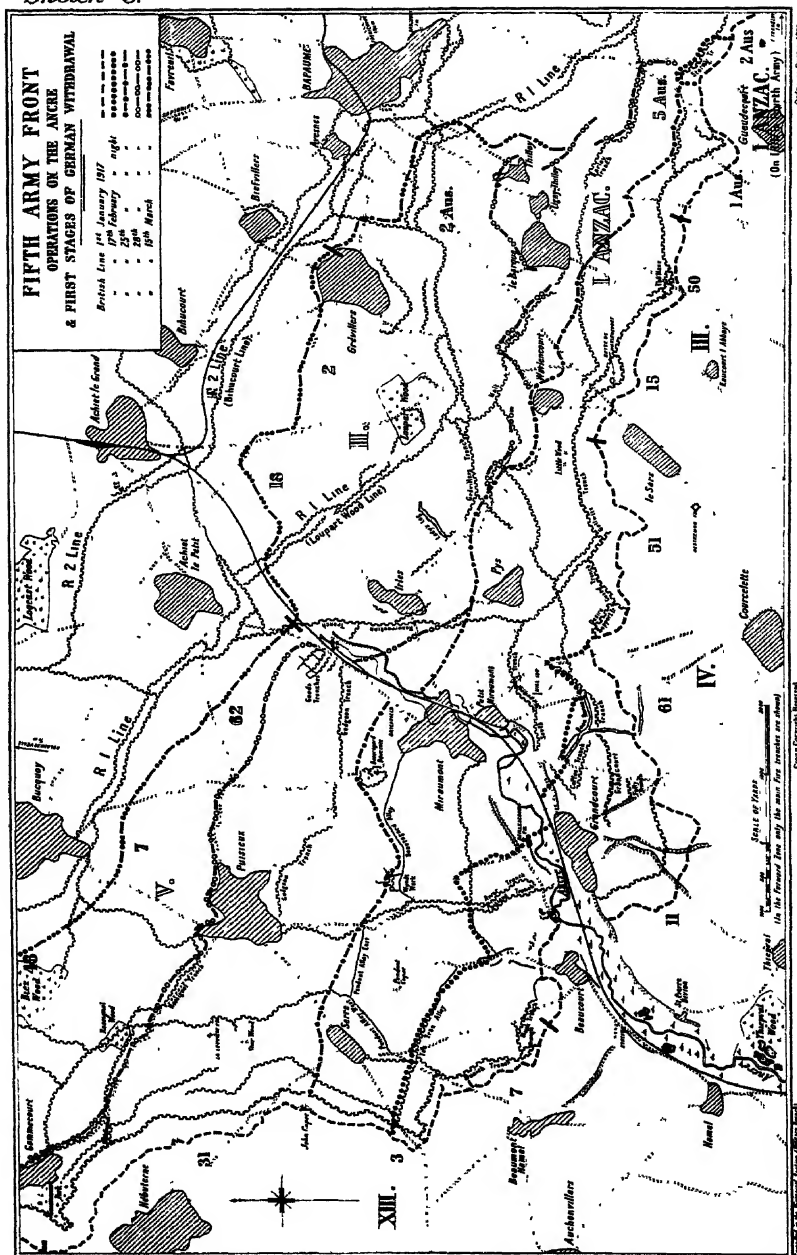
15th), and XVII. (9th, 34th and 51st). The other two Armies held wide fronts sparsely. The First, between Ecurie and Le Tilleloy (south-east of Laventie), had in line the Canadian Corps (2nd, 4th and 1st Canadian Divisions), I. (37th and 21st) and the XI. (5th and 56th). The Second held from Le Tilleloy to Bësinghe with the II. Anzac Corps (57th, 3rd Australian and New Zealand Divisions), IX. (36th and 16th), X. (41st, 47th and 23rd¹), and VIII. (55th and 38th).

In reserve, and for the most part carrying out training, were the 4th, 6th, 11th, 17th, 24th, 25th, 39th and 3rd Canadian Divisions. The 59th, from the United Kingdom, was assembling at Amiens, and the 66th was on its way to France. These two were the last of the batch of 2nd Line Territorial Force divisions from home; the other three—57th, 58th and 62nd—had all been put into the line almost immediately on arrival. The Portuguese 1st Division had landed in France. The Cavalry Corps with its five divisions lay near the coast between the Canche and the Bresle, a district to which it had been moved, by arrangement with the French, to save the transport of forage. The headquarters of two corps, the XIII. and XIX., were out of the line.

There was still a considerable amount of coming and going behind the British front, in particular movement of divisions and heavy artillery to the Third Army and the right of the First, where the principal blows were to be struck; but the dispositions were now rapidly reaching the form required for the offensive. Meanwhile, however, during the months of January and February, a series of minor operations had been carried out by the two Armies on the right. Their object was partly, especially on the Fifth Army front, to improve the situation locally in view of the coming offensive; partly to induce the enemy to believe that the Battle of the Somme was reopening; and partly to ensure that he should not recover from the strain to which he had been subjected. He had actually been given a respite longer than the Commander-in-Chief desired, but that was because the state of the ground had made it impossible to continue the successful thrusts of mid-November. As the Fifth Army was the first to strike, and its operations were by far the more important, they will first be described.

¹ The 23rd Division was awaiting relief by the 39th.

Sketch 3.



OPERATIONS ON THE ANCRE :

11TH JANUARY TO 14TH FEBRUARY

The rôle of the Fifth Army was still, in substance, an attack up the valley of the Ancre, and the operations with which the year opened were preliminaries designed mainly to secure a more suitable front of attack for the major operations that were to follow. The capture of Beaumont Hamel and Beaucourt in November had carried the line almost to the crest of the Beaumont Hamel spur, north of these villages. A comparatively short further advance would not only dislodge the enemy from the points south of the Ancre to which he still clung, but also gain complete possession of the Beaumont Hamel spur, and thus bring into view the German communications and battery positions behind Serre. Thereafter, in the Commander-in-Chief's own words, "the configuration of the ground in the neighbourhood of the Ancre valley was such that every fresh advance would enfilade the enemy's positions and automatically open up to the observation of our troops some new part of his defences".¹

Since mid-November constant rain and its effect upon the ground, pounded and lacerated by shell-fire and traffic, had made offensive operations impossible. The state of the ground of the Somme battlefield during December was such as was probably never surpassed on the Western Front—hardly even in the Ypres Salient.² And if any part of that front were worse than another, it was the valley of the Ancre. Here, in a wilderness of mud, holding water-logged trenches or shell-hole posts, accessible only by night, the infantry abode in conditions which might be likened to those of earth-worms rather than of human kind. Our vocabulary is not adapted to describe such an existence, because it is outside experience for which words are normally required. Mud, for the men in the line, was no mere inorganic nuisance and obstacle. It took on an aggressive, wolf-like guise, and like a wolf could pull down and swallow the lonely wanderer in the darkness. When it was at its worst no more was feasible than to hold the line and to ensure that the troops in it were fed and regularly

¹ "Sir Douglas Haig's Despatches" (Dent's Edition), p. 63.

² "Possibly not quite so holding, but decidedly more slippery" (than the mud of the Salient) is the view of one who commanded, first, a battalion, then a brigade.

relieved. Even this process imposed an all but unbearable physical and moral strain upon powers of endurance, however great the determination and technical skill of the troops responsible for the maintenance of communications and supply. Wheeled transport became useless. Every ration, every box of ammunition, had to be man-handled in the dark. All the horses of the batteries and ammunition columns were converted into pack animals, and the wastage among them during the transport crisis, when the oats ration fell to 6 lbs., was very high. In early January there was a certain improvement, though the first operations here described took place when the ground was still a morass ; and it was not until the 14th of the month that frost changed the situation.

At the beginning of the year, the Fifth Army held a front of some ten miles, extending westward from about Le Sars to the Grandcourt—Thiepval road, crossing the Ancre between Grandcourt and Beaucourt, running along the lower slopes of the Beaumont Hamel spur to rejoin the old front line a little south of the Serre road, and continuing, as before the Battles of the Somme, to Gommecourt Park. The position was held by two corps : on the right, the IV. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. L. Woollcombe), with the 51st, 61st and 11th Divisions ; on the left, the XIII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir W. N. Congreve), with the 7th, 3rd and 31st Divisions. The dividing line lay north of and roughly parallel to the Ancre, midway between Beaucourt and Beaumont Hamel. The heavy artillery consisted of 22 heavy artillery groups containing 99 heavy and siege batteries, and five 15-inch howitzers.¹ The V. Corps, with the 19th and 32nd Divisions, and the II. Corps, with the 2nd, 18th and 63rd, were in reserve, the divisions engaged in training. It was the intention that not only the divisions in line but also the corps headquarters should shortly be relieved. The Army commander decided to take advantage of the relief, which was to be carried out between the 7th and 21st January, to bring up the relieving field artillery ahead of the infantry so as to utilize the guns of ten divisions in the minor operations to be carried out before the headquarters of the IV. and XIII. Corps handed over to their successors.

Facing the Fifth Army was part of the German *First*

¹ In the course of January, 12 heavy and siege batteries were withdrawn from the Army, but it received 6 new siege batteries from home, so that at the end of the month it had still 93 batteries.

Army, under the command of General Fritz von Below. It held a very much wider front, but between Le Sars and Gommecourt had in line almost as many troops: from right to left of the British Fifth Army, the *1st Guard Reserve, 17th, 18th, 33rd, 14th Bavarian and 2nd Guard Reserve Divisions*.¹ There were known to be approximately ten German divisions in reserve, but covering a front considerably broader than that of the Fifth Army.

January opened with some slight activity on the part of the enemy on the Fifth Army front. On the night of the 1st he captured Hope Post, on the left flank of the 7th Division, and just west of the Beaumont Hamel—Serre road. On the night of the 5th, not only was this post recovered by a platoon of the 9/Devonshire, but a neighbouring one, just inside the 3rd Division's sector, was taken by a platoon of the 2/Royal Scots. In all, 56 prisoners were captured, at very slight cost, and a counter-attack on the left post was repulsed.

The British operations began by moonlight at 2 A.M. on the 10th, the objective being a system of trenches known as "The Triangle", a thousand yards east of Beaumont Hamel, and the communication trenches flanking it, that on the eastern side being the notorious "Muck Trench". The attack was carried out by the 2/Border Regiment of the 20th Brigade, 7th Division (Major-General G. de S. Barrow), after 18 hours' bombardment and under cover of a barrage maintained by the field artillery on the line of the objective. Owing to the state of the ground, very soft even where unbroken but almost all churned up by continuous shell-fire, an advance by waves was impracticable. Instead, it was carried out by three bombing parties which worked their way forward independently, carrying "duck-boards" to cross the worst morasses, and were allowed no less than twenty minutes to cover from 250 to 300 yards. All objectives were captured, and, though in some cases the trenches were waist-deep in water, the new position was consolidated soon after dawn. There was no counter-attack.² One

¹ The left of the *1st Guard Reserve Division* was slightly further south than the right of the Fifth Army at Le Sars. At Gommecourt, the right of the *2nd Guard Reserve Division* was considerably further north than the left of the Fifth Army, which had thus facing its six divisions approximately five German.

² The *130th Regiment (33rd Division)* records that one which was being organized was broken up by the British artillery, and that a second was countermanded.

hundred and forty-two prisoners of the *130th Regiment* were taken, the British casualties being 65.

The effect of this success was to cover the right flank of next day's more important operation by troops of the 7th Division against Munich Trench, which ran from the Triangle to the Beaumont Hamel—Serre road, with a subsidiary attack by those of the 11th Division (Major-General A. B. Ritchie), on their right, against German posts and machine-gun emplacements east of Muck Trench. The latter attack, carried out by two companies of the 5/Dorsetshire, supported by one and a half companies of the 11/Manchester, was a failure. The objective was reached, but unfortunately, in the dim light of a foggy dawn, a large dug-out was overrun. A party of the enemy issued from this to take the attackers in rear at the same time that they were assailed also from the north and east. After bitter hand-to-hand fighting, they were forced back to their original line with a loss of some sixty men.

This incident had, happily, no appreciable effect upon the main enterprise, the most important of the operations for the purpose of clearing the Beaumont Hamel spur, which was carried out by the 91st Brigade (Br.-General H. R. Cumming). At 5 A.M. two companies of the 22/Manchester, two of the 1/South Staffordshire, and two and a half of the 21/Manchester, were lined up on a tape previously laid, at a distance of from two to three hundred yards from Munich Trench. The heavy artillery bombardment had been maintained for the past two days, with but occasional intermission, all along the Fifth Army front, being only less heavy in the neighbourhood of Serre than on the front of attack, so as to induce the enemy to believe that this very natural objective was again about to be assaulted by the British.

At 6.37 A.M., ten minutes before zero and in thick fog, the field artillery of the 32nd and 7th Divisions, reinforced from that of the 3rd, put down a standing barrage on Munich Trench and a creeping barrage in front of the assaulting troops. Again the condition of the ground is indicated, this time by the rate of the barrage lift, 50 yards in five minutes, believed to be the slowest of the War. One German post on the front of the 21/Manchester held out, despite special bombardment by howitzers, until 8 A.M.; otherwise the opposition was not determined. By 10.30 the fog had cleared, and it was possible to bring up material for consolidation, over ground largely screened

from the enemy's view. Some two hundred prisoners of the *130th Regiment* were captured, the British casualties being 11 officers and 264 other ranks.

The German wireless reported the repulse of attacks against Serre; so from that point of view the result was satisfactory. More important was it that the enemy was at last deprived of the observation he had enjoyed of the British approaches from Auchonvillers.

As soon as this operation was over, the V. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir E. A. Fanshawe) took over the sector of the XIII., the 3rd Division in the centre having already been relieved by the 32nd on the 9th January, and the relief of the 31st Division, on the left, by the 19th being carried out on the evening of the 11th.

South of the Ancre, the troops of the II. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir C. W. Jacob) began to take over the front of the IV., the 2nd and 18th Divisions replacing the 51st and 61st. The 11th Division remained in long enough to carry out, on the 17th—still under the orders of the IV. Corps—another operation against the intricate system of posts and dug-outs on the slope west of the Beaucourt—Puisieux road. These, including the dug-out which had caused the failure of the 11th, had apparently been evacuated during the bombardment, but the assaulting companies of the 6/York & Lancaster and 6/Green Howards suffered heavily from artillery fire in occupying them. A counter-attack was reported to be developing at 10 A.M., but was at once dispersed by the British artillery. On the 20th the 63rd (R.N.) Division relieved the 11th, and the II. Corps took over from the IV. On the 22nd the V. Corps was reduced to two divisions, the 7th being withdrawn and the 32nd and 19th taking over increased frontages.

During the remainder of the month no event occurred of any importance, but previous gains were slightly extended, especially on the Beaumont Hamel spur, where the 32nd Division pushed its way well over the crest. The hard frost which had now begun and was to continue for a month had, as elsewhere recorded, unfortunate effects upon traffic on the thinly metalled roads in the rearward zone. To the troops in the line it was almost wholly beneficial. Cold was a lesser terror than mud, except perhaps when the thermometer dropped, as it did on the 25th January, to 15 degrees Fahrenheit. Movement was now possible on the frozen surface in places where it had been impossible before. The disease of "trench feet", which was not only painful

and sometimes dangerous, even to the extent of involving amputation, but also a source of heavy wastage, disappeared. The general health of the troops was greatly improved, though the shortage of water, which often led them to cut blocks of ice from shell-holes and melt them in "dixies" or mess-tins, brought a new danger. Minor attacks were facilitated, except that wiring and digging on captured positions were almost out of the question. Explosives were used with fair success for entrenchment.

Meanwhile a beginning had been made of the transfer of divisions necessitated by the offensive plans of the Commander-in-Chief, and by the contemplated further relief of the French. Finally, on the 6th February, the IV. Corps, with the 51st, 61st, and later the 32nd Divisions, was transferred to the Fourth Army to take over from the French down to the Amiens—Roye road. The strengths of the two Armies were equalized by handing over the I. Anzac, the left corps of the Fourth Army, to the Fifth.

The situation had been altered by the preparations for the relief and by the thinning out of the British line (a phrase that may be taken to include artillery and also infantry in reserve) which would result from it. On the 30th January, General Gough submitted to the Commander-in-Chief a modified plan of operations. He dealt mainly with the preliminary measures necessary to secure the flanks of his advance on Achiet le Grand by the capture of Serre and Loupart Wood. These he divided into four phases: on the 3rd February, the capture of the southern portion of Puisieux Trench and River Trench, to give the V. Corps a better position for the attack on Serre; on the 20th, the capture of Hill 130, south of Miraumont, and simultaneously an advance eastward to take in Baillescourt Farm and cut off Grandcourt, thus avoiding the necessity for an attack against that village; on the 20th March, the capture of Serre itself; and on the 25th, the capture of Pys, Miraumont and Beauregard Dovecote. To this final stage there would possibly be added an attack by the I. Anzac Corps on Little Wood and the Butte de Warlencourt. General Gough added that when these operations had been brought to a successful conclusion, the Fifth Army would be favourably placed for an attack on Loupart Wood.¹ In general, the Commander-in-Chief agreed with this programme, but called for certain amendments, especially as regards the time-table. Before describing them, it will be

¹ The letter is given in Appendix 10.

convenient to give a short account of the operations which took place in the first week of February, and were, in fact, the first phase of General Gough's programme.

On the night of the 2nd February a slight advance was made without opposition by troops of the 32nd Division of the V. Corps in the neighbourhood of the Beaucourt—Puisieux road. On the 3rd, a more serious operation was directed against the double trench-line, Puisieux and River Trenches, which ran northward from the Ancre up the spur commanding Grandcourt, by the 63rd Division (Major-General C. D. Shute) of the II. Corps. With the object of surprise, so far as that was possible on ground covered with snow and in bright moonlight, the attack was launched at 11 P.M. Two battalions, Hood and Hawke of the 189th Brigade (Br.-General L. F. Philips), advanced on a front of 1,300 yards under a particularly accurate barrage, with the Nelson Battalion in support on the left flank. The artillery of flanking formations co-operated, while that of the 2nd Division fired a feint barrage south of Pys, on the extreme right of the Army's front. The heavy artillery carried out its usual tasks of counter-battery and bombardment. Neutralizing fire was opened at 11.3 P.M. on all German batteries which could fire on the area of operations, and was adjusted according to the reports received of the hostile barrage. At the same time seven heavy artillery groups bombarded targets such as Grandcourt, Baillescourt Farm, Beauregard Dovecote, and the main German trenches and works.

This was one of the hardest-fought and most confused of the secondary actions. The Hood Battalion on the right veered right-handed till it was actually facing south along the Ancre instead of east. By the efforts of Lieut.-Commander A. M. Asquith—who had been attached to the Staff but made his way up to his battalion in the midst of the battle—it was swung round. By dawn, Puisieux and River Trenches, both almost obliterated, had been gained on either flank, but in the centre there was a dangerous gap of 200 yards in the hands of the enemy. His posts also held out both in the low ground on the extreme right and behind the left flank. In the course of an anxious day, two hostile counter-attacks were launched against the new British positions, one at 10.30 A.M. on the right, where a post was retaken by the enemy, and one at 4 P.M., on the left, this being caught and broken up by artillery fire. In the evening, the Drake Battalion was brought up,

one company being ordered to recapture the lost post, and another to move up River Trench and close the gap between the Hood and Hawke. Another powerful counter-attack against the left flank was driven off with heavy loss, and bombing attacks on the right were likewise repulsed, but hard fighting went on throughout the night, and a number of British posts between the Ancre and the Beaucourt—Miraumont road were temporarily lost.

On the morning of the 5th the Germans were finally ejected from the centre of Puisieux Trench, and by 11.30 A.M. the gap in the British line was closed. The operation had been costly, the casualties of the 189th Brigade being 24 officers and 647 other ranks, as against a comparatively small number of captures, 176 prisoners and two machine guns. The success of the operation, however, made the evacuation of Grandcourt probable. Next morning, it was found that the enemy was gone.

As a result, the operation against Baillescourt Farm, on the northern bank of the Ancre, was put forward. At 11 P.M. on the 7th, the 1/H.A.C. of the 68rd Division carried the farm buildings and 150 yards of the sunken road running north towards Puisieux, capturing 87 prisoners. In the course of the night, the 10/Essex of the 18th Division (Major-General R. P. Lee) occupied Folly Trench, south-east of Grandcourt. The stage was now set for the bigger attack south of the Ancre which was shortly to follow.

North of the river, the 32nd Division (Major-General R. W. R. Barnes) edged closer to Serre by the capture, on the night of the 10th February, of the remainder of the trench known as Ten Tree Alley, east of the Beaumont—Serre road. The weather was ideal of its kind, the temperature being only about a degree below freezing-point, which seemed warm after previous experiences but left the ground still hard. The attack was carried out under a barrage by the 97th Brigade (Lieut.-Colonel C. R. I. Brooke), with the 11/Border Regiment and 2/K.O.Y.L.I. and a company of the 16/Northumberland Fusiliers (96th Brigade) on the left. Minor operations carefully prepared and rehearsed behind the lines were now generally successful. This was completely so, except that the garrisons of two German posts held out gallantly, and could not be dislodged. At 4.30 A.M. on the 11th a vigorous hostile counter-attack gained a momentary footing in the position, but the enemy was quickly driven off with heavy loss,

and two British machine guns which had been lost were recovered. Again, on the morning of the 13th, after the two attacking battalions had been relieved by the 16th and 17th Highland L.I., a fierce counter-attack reoccupied the left half of Ten Tree Alley. The two Highland battalions, which had suffered considerable loss and were exhausted, had to be relieved that night by the Border Regiment and K.O.Y.L.I., and these battalions succeeded without much difficulty in securing the whole objective. The line had thus been advanced some six hundred yards on a front of eleven hundred; an inconvenient re-entrant had been flattened out; the final stage preparatory to the attack on Serre had been reached; and heavy loss had been inflicted upon the enemy. The British casualties, 16 officers and 366 other ranks, were serious enough, but the prisoners numbered 210.

So far, then, all the minor operations had been successful. Their interest lies chiefly in that fact. They represented a steady pressure, by means of the capture of one commanding point after another, to secure observation, and in some cases to deny it to the enemy, in view of a larger offensive. From the tactical point of view, they are worthy of more detailed study than it is possible to devote to them here, study which would bring out the increase in skill in warfare of this type gained by the British Armies in the past six months. This can be observed in command and troops alike, but it is particularly apparent in the leadership of the battalion, the company and the platoon, as well as in the support of the field artillery. The odds in favour of the success of any of these limited attacks, even with short preparation, were now heavy. It remained to be seen how far this superiority of the offensive over the defensive, of which there had been little sign in July 1916, could be maintained in the next series of major operations.

OPERATIONS ON THE ANCRE :

THE ACTIONS OF MIRAUMONT, 17TH/18TH FEBRUARY

On the 13th February, the Fourth Army front was extended to Genermont, ten miles S.S.W. of its previous right at Bouchavesnes, in relief of the French. On the 15th, in order to equalize the frontages and strengths of the Armies in view of this relief and the further extension to

the Amiens—Roye road now in progress, the Fifth Army took over from the Fourth the I. Anzac Corps (Lieut.-General Sir W. R. Birdwood), containing the 1st, 2nd, 4th and 5th Australian Divisions. After this transfer, the point of junction between the two Armies was a thousand yards north-east of Gueudecourt.

It will be recalled that, in his letter of the 30th January, General Gough had suggested that he would be ready to capture Serre by the 20th March, and by the 25th, Pys, Miraumont and Beauregard Dovecote. The Commander-in-Chief's comment was that the rôle of the Army was to strike a blow as strong as possible between Gueudecourt and Beaumont Hamel, and to follow this up rapidly in the direction of Achiet le Grand with the object of breaking the enemy's front and attracting his reserves to the profit of the Third Army. He desired that the Fifth Army should join hands with the Third in the direction of St. Leger, so as to envelop the bulk of the hostile troops in the Gommecourt salient: the dates in General Gough's scheme would probably be too late, and he was therefore to be prepared to make his final advance by the 15th, on the assumption that the attack of the Third Army could commence shortly afterwards. He was also instructed to consider whether the accession to his command of the I. Anzac Corps would permit him to attempt more than he had contemplated.¹

On the 16th February General Gough submitted a plan revised in accordance with these instructions and with the changes made in the situation by his recent successful attacks. He remarked that he had difficulty in foreseeing which would be the enemy's line of resistance to a renewed advance. One line ran from Loupart Wood through Achiet le Petit to Bucquoy, and it appeared that, short of this, no serious opposition was likely to be encountered; even this trench might prove to be no more than an outpost to the Bihucourt line (running beyond Grévillers past Logeast Wood and covering Achiet le Grand), on which it was known that much labour had been expended.

He therefore suggested that his main operation should be the capture of the Loupart Wood line in order to gain observation for the attack on the Bihucourt line beyond.

¹ The official letter in this sense is dated 8th February. In this, as in many similar cases, a semi-official letter gives the Commander-in-Chief's views more clearly; it is therefore given in Appendix 13, instead of the official one. It was addressed by the Chief of the General Staff, Lieut.-General Sir L. E. Kiggell, to Major-General Neill Malcolm, Major-General, General Staff, Fifth Army.

Meanwhile, as a preliminary, he would carry out a series of minor operations mainly with the object of covering the necessary battery positions. He would continue to follow the method of successive advances astride the Ancre, each opening the way to the next, which had hitherto proved so satisfactory. They would be: the capture of Hill 130, between Pys and Petit Miraumont, on the 17th February; the capture of the Butte de Warlencourt and the trench between it and Gueudecourt on the 1st March; the capture of Serre on the 7th, followed by the extension of the V. Corps front to the Ancre, thereby releasing the 63rd Division of the II. Corps; and the capture of Miraumont on the 10th. With the Butte de Warlencourt, Miraumont and Serre in his hands, the way would be clear for the capture of the Loupart Wood line. Since his principal object—and, indeed, the only one for which his resources sufficed—was to assist the Third Army in front of Arras, he proposed to deliver this stroke three days before the attack of that Army; if the interval between the attacks were longer, the enemy might not only have time to check the Fifth Army, but also to realize that he had done so and could now safely turn his entire attention to the Third.

General Gough did not think he could look further ahead to the possibility of joining hands with the Third Army at St. Leger, as the Commander-in-Chief had directed; but he stated that he would bear this scheme in mind throughout.¹ The Commander-in-Chief's comment was simply that the operations should be planned so that "the largest and "most vigorous attack" was carried out three days before the opening of the Third Army's offensive at Arras, while retaining sufficient troops in hand "to continue the "struggle energetically for a week or more". To this General Gough replied, on the 21st, that he would have six or seven divisions, out of the 14 which were eventually to be allotted to him, available to continue fighting for a week or more after his attack on the Loupart Wood line.

The first of the series of operations was to gain possession of the high ground overlooking Miraumont from the south. Its capture would not only give the British command of the southern approaches to Miraumont and Pys, but also afford them ground observation of the enemy's battery positions behind Serre. A subsidiary object was to improve still further the positions north of the Ancre, extending the recent gains along the line of the sunken road from Bailles-

¹ This letter is given in Appendix 16.

court Farm to Puisieux which ran up the spur north of Grandcourt, and so commanding Miraumont from the west. Taken as a whole, this operation was likely to lead to the evacuation of Miraumont by the enemy, while that, in its turn, would render his position in the salient at Serre untenable.

The attack was carried out by troops of the 2nd (Major-General C. E. Pereira), 18th (Major-General R. P. Lee), and 63rd (Major-General C. D. Shute) Divisions of the II. Corps on the 17th February. Its main feature, the capture of Hill 130, south-east of Miraumont, was undertaken by the 99th Brigade of the 2nd Division and the 54th and 53rd Brigades of the 18th. North of the Ancre, the 63rd Division was entrusted with the chief rôle in the subsidiary attack. The ground being still frozen, so that the preparation of assembly trenches was a matter involving too much labour, it had been decided that the troops should form up in the open under cover of darkness and attack at dawn. Unfortunately, the thaw began on the 16th, and at dawn on the 17th there was dark cloud overhead, wet mist near the ground, and underfoot a slippery surface, which soon degenerated into deep, greasy mud once more. Perhaps the most serious consequence of the changed conditions was that the barrage lifts had been timed for infantry moving over frozen ground and were now too fast.

The artillery of the II. Corps had for the past three days been cutting wire and firing for destruction on hostile batteries. For the former purpose the 60-pdrs. and 6-inch howitzers used the "106" fuze, bursting on graze and very effective, especially, it appears, in frosty weather. The work, had, however, been much hindered by poor visibility. At zero, four siege groups were to bombard rear lines, machine-gun emplacements, and targets of a like nature, while the four counter-battery groups endeavoured to neutralize the enemy's artillery.¹

At 4.30 A.M. the enemy, who had shown signs of nervousness all night, opened a violent bombardment on the front of the attack. It appears that five or six hours earlier he had captured at least one prisoner or deserter

¹ Siege groups: II., XXV., XXXVI., and XL. Heavy Artillery Groups, with ten 6-in. howitzer, five 8-in. howitzer, two 9.2-in. howitzer batteries, and two 15-in. howitzers; Counter-battery groups: IX., X., XLV., and LV. Heavy Artillery Groups, with ten 60-pdr., one 4.7-in., two 6-in. howitzer, two 6-in. gun, two 8-in. howitzer, two 9.2-in. howitzer, two 12-in. howitzer batteries, and two 15-in. howitzers.

from whom he learnt that there was to be an assault at dawn.¹ Moving up and lying out in the open under this fire, the troops suffered serious casualties, but good leadership and discipline enabled the assembly to be completed in time. After anxious consideration it was decided not to open retaliatory fire, which might well have increased the punishment of the infantry, and after a time the German artillery slackened off. Nevertheless, it was doubtless largely because the enemy knew what to expect that the subsidiary attack which was to cover the right flank completely failed, despite the utmost determination, to capture its objective, Desire Support Trench and Guard Trench, south of Pys. Apparently the enemy manned the whole length of these trenches, which met to form a sharp salient, in exceptional strength. There were also too few gaps in the wire, and those that had been cut were covered by machine guns.

In this subsidiary attack the 2/South Staffordshire (6th Brigade, 2nd Division) was supported by eleven 18-pdr. and three 4.5-inch howitzer batteries, about half of them belonging to the I. Anzac Corps on the right.² All forward communication failed, and no news was received till 7.30 A.M., when a wounded officer came in to report very heavy casualties. Soon after 9 A.M. it was discovered that, though all along the front the objective had been reached and a few prisoners had been taken, such parties as had won a lodgement in the two trenches had been forced out again. There were not troops available to renew the assault, even had that been practicable in daylight, and the survivors of the South Staffordshire were therefore withdrawn.

This failure was not without its repercussion on the main attack of the 99th, 54th and 53rd Brigades, of which the objective was the whole of the high ground between the eastern of the two parallel roads from Courcelette to

¹ German prisoners also stated subsequently that warning had been given by the capture of a British document several days earlier.

² The barrage here, as on the whole front south of the Ancre, was of an interesting type, based upon the lessons of the Battles of the Somme. There was a rolling barrage of half the 18-pdrs., which opened 200 yards in front of the assaulting infantry and moved at an average pace of 100 yards in three minutes. There was a rear barrage of one-eighth of the 18-pdrs., to search and sweep to a depth of 250 yards in rear of the enemy's trenches, in succession as each was assaulted. A standing barrage of the remaining 18-pdrs. rested on the trenches in succession till joined by the rolling barrage, with which it lifted. Finally, a protective barrage of all guns was formed when the objective was due to have been gained.

Petit Miraumont and the Albert—Arras railway. Such a thrust would require a defensive flank on the road mentioned, and this was to be established as the advance proceeded. It was to be made in three successive stages. The first objective was about six hundred yards distant and 300 yards short of the crest of Hill 130 ; the second, South Miraumont Trench, was another six hundred yards further on, and its capture would carry the line over Hill 130 on the right, and up to the railway, midway between Miraumont and Grandcourt, on the left ; the third was the southern edge of Petit Miraumont. The dividing line between the 2nd and 18th Divisions ran parallel to and fifty yards west of the western Courcellette—Miraumont road, giving the 99th Brigade of the 2nd Division a frontage of 700 yards. This brigade thus had its boundaries clearly marked by two roads, both of them sunken. In the centre, however, the 54th Brigade of the 18th Division had to advance across a slope slanting steeply down to the left, and its first objective was a very formidable one, a trench behind which lay the deep “ Boom Ravine ”. The left brigade, the 53rd, had a wider front, very much exposed to fire from the north side of the Ancre, but its task was to end when it had captured its second objective.

Each of the three brigades was attacking with two battalions in line. In the 99th these were the 23/Royal Fusiliers and the 1/K.R.R.C., with one company each from the 22nd and 23/Royal Fusiliers to form the defensive flank. Two and a half companies of the 22/Royal Fusiliers were deployed in rear across the whole of the brigade's frontage, to pass through and capture the third objective. The 54th Brigade had the 6/Northamptonshire and 11/Royal Fusiliers, with three and two companies, respectively, in line, each battalion having attached to it a company of the 12/Middlesex to deal with dug-outs up to the line of Boom Ravine and consolidate the first objective. The remainder of that battalion was in support. On the front of the 53rd Brigade, the 8/Suffolk and 6/R. Berkshire, with two and three companies, respectively, in line, were each supported by a company of the 8/Norfolk. Another company of this battalion was on the left of the attacking line.

The artillery support was powerful, consisting of all the divisional artillery of the 2nd Division less three batteries of the XLI. Brigade R.F.A. (taking part in the subsidiary attack on the right flank), reinforced by the XXXIV. Army

Brigade, and the three 18-pdr. batteries of the Australian XIV. Brigade; and the divisional artillery of the 18th Division, reinforced by that of the 31st and by the LXXXIV. Army Brigade: making a total of 150 18-pdrs. and 42 4·5-inch howitzers. In addition, the 157th Siege Battery was at the disposal of the 2nd Division, and the 27th at that of the 18th, both these batteries consisting of 6-inch howitzers. From half an hour after zero onwards four 18-pdr. and two 4·5-inch howitzer batteries of the 63rd Division were diverted from their original task north of the Ancre to assist the left flank of the 18th Division. There was difficulty in establishing the barrage because in some places the curve of the trajectory was almost identical with that of the ground.

At 5.45 A.M. on the 17th the barrage opened, and the infantry began the advance. The reply of the German artillery was not particularly effective, but here, just as opposite the subsidiary attack, the defence was on the alert, and machine-gun and rifle fire, encountered from the very first, caused serious loss. This fire, the darkness and mist—the hour having been fixed to meet the conditions of a clear frosty morning, and being too early in the changed conditions—and the state of the ground, once again a sea of sticky mud, slowed up the advance and caused some confusion and intermingling of units.¹

On the right, the 99th Brigade (Lieut.-Colonel R. Barnett-Barker) gained its first objective, established its defensive flank, and held it despite determined counter-attacks.² The 54th Brigade (Br.-General T. H. Shoubridge) found the wire at Grandcourt Trench insufficiently cut. The delay caused by searching for gaps, while the barrage moved on, enabled the enemy to man the trench, and temporarily to hold up the 6/Northamptonshire by his fire. The 11/Royal Fusiliers, on the left, found the wire better cut in front of its section of Grandcourt Trench; but this battalion suffered heavy losses, including all the officers taking part in the attack, and was likewise checked. The 8/Suffolk of the 53rd Brigade (Br.-General H. W. Higginson) captured its section, but found Coffee Trench ahead strongly held, and its wire still a serious obstacle. Its reserve company in Grandcourt Trench put out of action

¹ Many of the executants had protested against the early zero hour. It would possibly have been risky to alter the barrage at short notice, but there seems no good reason why zero should not have been put back.

² For his bravery and fine leadership in the defence of this flank Lce.-Sergt. F. W. Palmer, 22/Royal Fusiliers, was awarded the V.C.

three German machine guns in Boom Ravine which were holding up the advance of the 11/Royal Fusiliers, and enabled this battalion to continue its advance. The 6/R. Berkshire, showing great determination, worked its way through gaps in the wire of Coffee Trench. By 6.10 A.M. the whole of this trench was in the hands of the 53rd Brigade, the left of which then pushed on to the Grandcourt—Petit Miraumont road. In the centre, on the 54th Brigade front, the line of Boom Ravine was not completely captured until 7.45 A.M., by which time the barrage had moved far ahead. Eventually, the 6/Northamptonshire fought its way, without fire support, into South Miraumont Trench, on the outskirts of Petit Miraumont, but the 11/Royal Fusiliers, now greatly reduced in numbers, could not gain a footing in this line.

Meanwhile, on the right, the 99th Brigade was engaged in heavy fighting, rendered confused by the mist. Advancing to the second objective, the two battalions, already much reduced in numbers, were—owing to the failure of the 2/South Staffordshire in the subsidiary attack—raked by machine-gun fire from the high ground on their right. A few of the 1/K.R.R.C. entered South Miraumont Trench, but these small and scattered parties were presently compelled to fall back to the first objective. At about the same time, a vigorous counter-attack was delivered by fresh German troops, the *I./75th Regiment* from Petit Miraumont, and a company of the *89th Grenadiers* from the bank to the west of it on the Grandcourt—Petit Miraumont road, against the 6/Northamptonshire. The British rifles and Lewis guns had become clogged with mud, and the battalion was forced back. With parties of the 1/K.R.R.C. from its right and of the 11/Royal Fusiliers from its left, all units being by this time much intermingled, the Northamptonshire then swung back to form a defensive flank facing eastwards along the West Miraumont road. Here, however, it found itself assailed by fire not only from the front but also from South Miraumont Trench, in the left rear. It was therefore compelled to bring back its left to about one hundred yards north of Boom Ravine, and the 11/Royal Fusiliers conformed to this movement.

The advance of the two divisions then came to a standstill. It had fallen far short of what had been planned, but was nevertheless one of 500 yards on the right, 1,000 yards in the centre, and 800 on the left. The difficult ground of which Boom Ravine was the chief feature had been taken

and was firmly held. On the other hand, the main objective, the all-important height of Hill 130, was still in the hands of the enemy, and the British casualties had been very high. In the 2nd Division, they amounted to 49 officers and 969 other ranks, and in the 18th Division to 54 and 1,135.

North of the Ancre, the attack of the 63rd Division was carried out by the 188th Brigade (Br.-General R. E. S. Prentice), with two battalions of the 189th. The division already held Baillescourt Farm and the southern end of the sunken road leading north from it to Puisieux. It was now required to capture the road for another seven hundred yards, thus gaining possession of the eastern side of the slope overlooking Miraumont, and to form a defensive flank facing northwards to its present left.

Two battalions, the Howe and 1/Royal Marines, each in two waves on a two-company front, were to carry out the frontal attack. On their right, the Anson Battalion kept two companies ready either to reinforce the attacking troops of its own brigade or to move out between the Ancre and the Miraumont road in co-operation with those of the 18th Division beyond the river. Behind the 1/R. Marines, two companies of the 2/R. Marines were assembled in readiness to establish posts along the defensive flank, assisted by the 2nd (R.N.D.) Field Company R.E. and a company of the 14/Worcestershire (Pioneers). The artillery consisted of the whole of the divisional artillery and the CCCXV. Army Brigade R.F.A., fifty-four 18-pdrs. and eighteen 4.5-inch howitzers. Three 18-pdr. batteries of the 62nd Division (V. Corps) were to place a protective barrage along the northern flank of the attack, and the four 6-inch howitzers of the 140th Siege Battery were at the disposal of the divisional commander.

Here again the handicaps of mud, fog, and darkness had to be overcome, but, if the enemy had been forewarned, he apparently made less use of his information here than south of the river. Another favourable factor was that the barrage moved at the rate of 100 yards in four minutes instead of three, as elsewhere.¹ Comparatively little opposition was encountered, except for two or three isolated strong points. By 6.40 A.M. the whole objective appeared to have been gained, and posts along the defensive

¹ South of the Ancre it moved at 100 yards in three minutes to the first objective and 100 yards in four minutes thereafter; but, as will readily be understood, it was the pace up to the first objective that counted.

flank were established. It was then found that on the left a strong point was still holding out. This gave trouble, but was taken by the 1/R. Marines by 10.50.

Not till next day did the enemy launch a serious counter-attack, and this was promptly broken up by exceptionally fine artillery co-operation. Major H. Ozanne, 1/R. Marines, reported the counter-attack to Br.-General Prentice, and the latter, with a telephone to each ear, passed on his messages direct to the artillery, which lengthened and shortened the barrage as requested. The enemy was caught about 400 yards from the British line, and the attack collapsed.

The casualties of the 63rd Division were 23 officers and 526 other ranks. The captures by the three divisions in the whole operation were 11 officers and 588 other ranks.

The limited measure of success south of the Ancre was due, first, to the fact that the enemy had been forewarned. Unfortunately it seems only too certain—though conclusive evidence is lacking—that this was one of the very rare cases in the whole course of the War that a deserter gave away British plans. The second factor was the sudden change in the weather. This not only made the ground holding, so that the barrage moved too fast for the infantry, but, at least on the day prior to the assault, it also shrouded the enemy's position in mist, and rendered observation of the wire-cutting very difficult. The infantry never fought with more confidence and gallantry. It had made considerable progress by its own unaided efforts when the barrage had been lost, and might even then have won through to the final objective had the attack been a surprise.

MINOR OPERATIONS OF THE FOURTH ARMY

Almost the whole of January and February was occupied by the Fourth Army in the relief of the French or in arrangements for it. The Army had, it will be recalled, already taken over the front as far as Bouchavesnes by the 12th December.¹ The further relief may be said to have been carried out in three stages. First, the XV. Corps extended its right to the Somme on the 22nd January, this movement involving slight side slips to the right by the XIV. and I. Anzac Corps. Next, the III. Corps came round and took over to Genermont on the 13th February. Finally, at a period not reached in this chapter, the IV. Corps, previously

¹ See p. 19.

in the Fifth Army, relieved the French to the Amiens—Map 1. Roye road.

The fact that troops and especially artillery were constantly on the move naturally limited the Army's offensive capacity; in any case attacks at times when reliefs were impending were always dangerous, as they involved the risk of retaliation by the enemy's artillery falling on crowded communication trenches. On the other hand, the Commander-in-Chief's instructions of the 2nd January contained the sentence: "This Army will, however, make "all necessary arrangements to carry out limited operations "to induce the enemy to believe that the Battle of the "Somme is recommencing".¹ General Rawlinson therefore ordered a series of secondary attacks with this end in view, naturally choosing points where a small advance would afford extended observation of the German positions and communications or deny to the enemy observation of those of the British.

The first of these was carried out on the 27th January by the 87th Brigade (Br.-General R. N. Bray) of the 29th Division (Major-General Sir Beauvoir de Lisle), on the front of the XIV. Corps. It was launched in a due northerly direction, astride the Frégicourt—Le Transloy road, on a frontage of 750 yards, the final objective being about 400 yards distant in the centre. It was therefore quite a small operation of a familiar pattern, differing only from many others by the astonishing number of prisoners captured.

The fire of the 96 18-pdrs. available for the direct support of the attack was divided into two barrages, the first of which was dropped on the German front line, where it remained five minutes. During the last minute it was joined by the second barrage, which had been placed from 25 to 50 yards short of the German front line, and the two then lifted together to a line 100 yards further north. From that line they continued creeping forward at 25 yards a minute to the final protective line. These barrages were extended on either flank by the artillery of the 20th and the 5th Australian Divisions. In addition to the 16 4.5-inch howitzers, two 6-inch howitzer batteries, one 9.2-inch howitzer battery, and a section of 8-inch howitzers were at the disposal of the division for bombardment of trench and road junctions, strongpoints, and machine-gun emplacements. The XIV. Corps Heavy Artillery endeavoured to

¹ Mention of these instructions is made on p. 19, and they are given in Appendix 6.

neutralize the enemy's batteries, and did so with a large measure of success during the period of the actual assault.

The assault, by the 1/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers on the right and 1/Border Regiment on the left, took the enemy by surprise. The frost had made the ground very hard, so that movement was easy, though consolidation was very far from being so. In general the enemy, though composed of first-class troops, surrendered without serious resistance. A machine gun in a strong point held up a company of the Border Regiment till Sergeant E. J. Mott, though severely wounded in the eye, rushed forward and after a hand-to-hand struggle captured both gunner and gun. For this feat of arms Sergeant Mott was awarded the Victoria Cross. All objectives were captured, though one strong point had to be evacuated in consequence of heavy shell-fire. The total haul of prisoners was 368, including 38 wounded, an exceptional number to fall to an attack by two battalions and with shallow objectives.¹ The British casualties were 60 killed, 266 wounded and 76 missing, mainly from the bombardment of the following day and night.

The second operation was carried out by a company and a half of the 15th Battalion (4th Australian Brigade) of the I. Anzac Corps, on the evening of the 1st February. In this case the objective was an even smaller one, consisting of a trench known as Stormy Trench, about 400 yards in length and at its nearest point only 100 yards from the Australian lines. The right of the attack was held up by uncut wire, but the left took its portion of the trench and by bombing down it secured the greater part of the whole objective. At 4 A.M. on the 2nd the Germans launched a strong counter-attack with the bomb. The S.O.S. signals were not seen for over half an hour, and by the time the artillery opened fire the Australians had been driven out. The battalion had suffered 186 casualties, the attacking party itself having been almost wiped out, but it had captured about fifty prisoners and, according to German reports, actually inflicted on the enemy losses rather higher than its own.²

¹ The prisoners belonged to the 119th and 121st Regiments of the 26th Division, a Württemberg formation considered one of the best in the German Army, and of the 11th Bavarian Reserve Regiment. The Württemberg regimental histories show that the Bavarian troops had been attached to their division pending a relief. They both avoid giving the number of their casualties, which must have been heavy.

² A.O.A. iv., p. 31. The German troops, of the 4th Ersatz Division, had a poor reputation, but fought gallantly.

On the night of the 4th the attack was repeated by the 13th Battalion with a company of the 14th in support. The artillery was strengthened and, as the failure of the 15th Battalion had been caused by lack of bombs, 12,000 were brought up for this occasion. Again the objective was swiftly carried, and again the enemy counter-attacked vigorously, but this time, after a bitter and prolonged bombing fight, the Australians prevailed. For their success they were largely indebted to the magnificent leadership of Captain H. W. Murray, who, in the words of the "London Gazette", "saved the situation by sheer valour", and won the Victoria Cross. Whereas, however, in the failure of the 1st February the Australian losses had been less numerous than those of the enemy, in this victorious action they lost one hundred more—about 350 as against 250.¹

The third attack was again quite small, being designed only to capture a section of trench which overlooked what had been the village of Saillisel. It was carried out by the 7/Green Howards under the orders of Br.-General G. D. Goodman, commanding the 52nd Brigade of the 17th Division, at 7.30 A.M. on the 8th February.² Owing to the intense frost the "jumping-off" line had taken three weeks to dig. Another effect of the frost had been to turn the water in the shell-holes into solid blocks, which had been in turn upheaved by subsequent explosions. In order to obtain some grip on the ice the men wore sandbags over their boots. There was no preliminary bombardment, but a double barrage of a nature similar to that employed by the 29th Division in the action just described was put down by seventeen 18-pdr. batteries, and overhead fire was directed on the German communications by four machine-gun companies. The artillery had a difficult problem, as the British posts and German trenches were very close together. Possibly, with many worn guns, a proportion of salvaged ammunition, and cordite damaged by the effect of frost on nitro-glycerine, the initial barrage-line was too risky. In the event, several guns or batteries fired short, causing casualties not only to the attacking battalion, but even to that on its flank, in the British front line.

The enemy was taken by surprise, and the objective was quickly secured, with 80 prisoners. A series of vigorous counter-attacks, however, threatened danger, as the battalion had run out of bombs owing to the short-shooting

¹ A.O.A., p. 37.

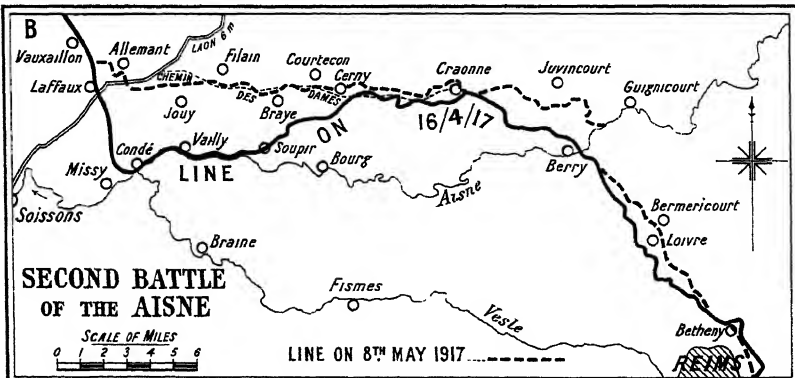
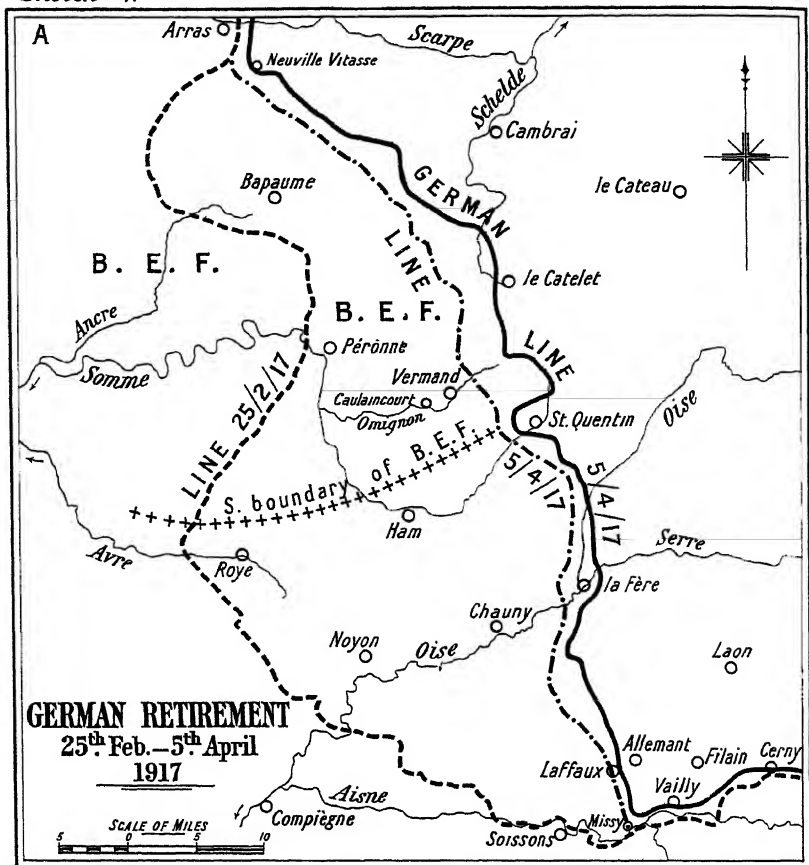
² The battalion was detached from its own brigade, the 50th.

batteries having scattered its carrying parties. In the end, all were eventually beaten off, as was one launched during the night of the 9th against the 10/West Yorkshire, which had taken over the new line. The 7/Green Howards had 72 killed, 120 wounded, and four missing, but the total losses of the division in the course of the two days were nearly twice as many.

No other active operations took place until the end of the month, with the exception of a number of trench raids, undertaken with varying success by both sides, in some of which the British suffered serious casualties. The actions which have been described were, it will be seen, different in type to and far smaller in scope than those carried out astride the Ancre. The Fifth Army was fighting its way forward step by step with definite objectives in view; the Fourth was really only demonstrating and striving to induce the enemy to believe that the attacks of 1916 were about to recommence upon the old battlefield.

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Sketch 4.



CHAPTER IV

THE GERMAN WITHDRAWAL

(Maps 1, 2 ; Sketches 3, 4)

THE HINDENBURG LINE

ON one or two fine, bright days towards the end of October 1916 British aviators had observed that fresh earth had been turned up just north of Quéant, 12 miles south-east of Arras and $14\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of the front line at Monchy au Bois.¹ As that seemed far back for a defensive position, a special reconnaissance of the work was ordered. The result was a report, received on the 9th November, that the enemy was constructing a trench through Quéant and Bullecourt, which crossed the Sensée and the Cojeul and joined his third line east of Neuville Vitasse. On the previous day there had appeared in the G.H.Q. Intelligence Summary an interesting report from a Russian prisoner, who had escaped into the French lines, that 2,000 of his compatriots were making concrete dug-outs, protected by wire, in the region of St. Quentin. The two reports do not seem to have been connected in British minds and at that time there was no reason why they should.

So, two sections of the Siegfried-Stellung, which was to become known to the British as the "Hindenburg Line", emerged into daylight at an early stage of its construction, but it was months before anything definite was known of the remainder of its course. Various explanations can be found for this failure to identify the new retrenchment. The line west of Quéant was behind an inactive section of the front and comparatively close to the British aerodromes. It was accordingly photographed in November between Bullecourt and Neuville Vitasse. On the fronts of the British Fourth and Fifth Armies it was further off, and the

¹ "The War in the Air", Vol. II., p. 317.

exceptionally wet and foggy winter was very unfavourable to long-distance aerial reconnaissance. Moreover, British attention was here concentrated on the three main intermediate lines of defence on which the enemy was working.

There is a German Army maxim that an officer who sends out a reconnaissance usually receives the return which his orders deserve. To the Royal Flying Corps all tasks came alike. If emphasis were laid upon the urgency of any particular one, it was prepared to fulfil that task at any sacrifice, as it proved later when called upon to photograph the Drocourt—Quéant Switch. On some occasions the relative importance of its various duties was insufficiently defined. There is no evidence that any special urgency was attributed by G.H.Q. or the Armies concerned to the discovery of the exact course of the Hindenburg Line. The period, too, was one when, by comparison with the enemy, the Royal Flying Corps was mechanically at its nadir. The six months ending in April 1917 were marked by the immense superiority of the twin-gun Albatross and Halberstadt to the machines opposed to them, and consequently—owing to their very much lower casualties—by the superiority in flying experience of the German airmen to the British.¹ The situation was to be changed by the arrival of the British 1917 “spring models”, but not until after the Battles of Arras.

Probably, also, many gaps existed in the Hindenburg Line when work was first begun on it, so that an aeroplane crossing its course might have found nothing. For that or some other reason it was reported on the 11th December that a reconnaissance which had included the area of Marcoing—in front of which the retrenchment actually passed—had “observed no unusual activity”. The line was plotted on the British Intelligence maps as extending from Neuville Vitasse to about Quéant, where for a long time it was shown as ending, though it was unlikely that a system of defence running in that direction would end there, and was named the “Cojeul Switch”.

Though there was no further news from the air throughout December and January, there were from other sources indications that the line extended south of Quéant. On the 2nd January, General Nivelle instructed his aviation services to co-operate with the British in reconnaissance of the system of defence which had more than once been mentioned by agents or returned civilians; but without

¹ “The War in the Air”, Vol. I, pp. 384-41.

result.¹ On the 26th, the British G.H.Q. Intelligence Summary recorded the report of French "rapatriés" that the Germans were constructing a line of defence "from Arras to Laon". Here, had it been recognized, was, though not the actual course, the true significance of the Hindenburg Line.

Further reports received by the French induced General Nivelle, on the 2nd February, to renew his instructions of a month earlier. Again mist, rain, snow, low-lying cloud, and the "very combative" attitude of the German aircraft prevented the reconnaissance, much less the photography, of the Hindenburg Line; and reconnoitred or photographed it never was until the enemy was in full retreat to its shelter in mid-March. The French historians recognize this frankly. "The General-in-Chief was thus not informed of the "situation of the Hindenburg Line . . . except by French "or Belgian rapatriés and German prisoners."²

The Royal Flying Corps did better than this. On the 2nd February, the day of General Nivelle's second instruction, it at last obtained a report regarding the line south of Quéant. By the 15th this was traced as far south as Bellicourt, and by the 25th down to St. Quentin. Meanwhile it had been observed at the end of January that another trench was being dug between Drocourt and Vitry en Artois, and by the 15th February that there was one between Quéant and Etaing, four miles south of Vitry. These were sections of a line which became known as the "Drocourt—Quéant Switch".

So, it was not until the 25th February, the day after the discovery of a local German withdrawal astride the Ancre, that the course of the Hindenburg Line opposite the whole of the British front could be plotted with certainty. Even then it was neither known where it ended, because the French had not yet obtained information on this point, nor whether the enemy was about to retire to it. It may be added that the photography of the Drocourt—Quéant Switch, as it was completed, proved extremely difficult and costly, mainly owing to the proximity of the Douai aerodrome, from which the celebrated Rittmeister Freiherr von Richthofen and his unit were operating. Despite the reck-

¹ F.O.A. v. (i.), p. 373.

² F.O.A. v. (i.), p. 376. Map 30 of that volume indicates that "at the "end of February" all the information about the line on the French front was unconfirmed from the air, whereas on the greater part of the British front it was so confirmed.

less gallantry of the Royal Flying Corps, adequate photographs of the southern part of the line were not obtained till the beginning of April, and even then its progress astride and north of the Scarpe was insufficiently known. Information was gained only at the price of heavy losses: for instance, on the 15th April Richthofen, with six machines, shot down six reconnaissance aeroplanes which were endeavouring to carry out photography, two others from a formation which was supposed to be protecting them, and, according to German evidence, thirteen in all on that day.¹

Of the local withdrawal mentioned above the British had, indeed, received an insistent warning. On the 20th and 21st February messages were picked up ordering wireless stations in the area of Achiet le Petit, Gréville, and north of Bapaume to dismantle their equipment and make ready to move back. This was, it is true, evidence of withdrawal, and evidence which might well have been more quickly and widely circulated than it actually was, but it had not necessarily any connection with the Hindenburg Line. As we shall see, the connection was in fact not close. From now onward, however, the evidence of captured prisoners, as well as the explosions and conflagrations observed, made it more and more certain that the enemy was about to withdraw to the Hindenburg Line.

Carefully as the Germans preserved their secret, this local withdrawal, which was far from being intended as a ruse and might actually have endangered their plan, did as much as anything else to create confusion in British minds. Apart from the Siegfried-Stellung, the enemy had three reserve lines of defence, five or six miles in depth, behind the Somme front. In the northern part of the battlefield the two foremost touched at Bapaume. The third branched off the second at Achiet le Grand and ran through Beugny, Ytres, Nurlu, and Templeux la Fosse.² It was actually under pressure that in the last week of February the enemy fell back suddenly to the foremost of these, the R. 1 line, thus causing the British to believe that it had always been his intention to retire by a long series of stages, which was

¹ The efforts to photograph the Drocourt—Quéant Switch are described in "The War in the Air", Vol. III., pp. 347, 350, 352, 355.

² Portions of the first and second lines were known to the British by various names: Loupart, Bapaume, le Transloy, and Bihucourt Lines. The third was generally known as the Beugny—Ytres Switch, that portion having been the first constructed, or at any rate the first discovered. They will generally be referred to here by their German names, R. (Riegel) 1, R. 2, and R. 3 Lines, which have the merit of simplicity.

not the case. A little later, the capture of a document revealed the nature of the plan of withdrawal known to the enemy by the code-word "Alberich".¹ German prisoners, escaped Allied prisoners, and rapatriés supplied also details of the defences, which could be checked and amplified by means of aerial photographs.

It was discovered that the construction of the Siegfried-Stellung or Hindenburg Line had been begun as far back as the previous September. The trace of the defences on a map did not, however, clearly indicate the rôle for which they were designed. "Line" is not an adequate translation of "Stellung", and its use by the British betrays a certain misconception. The Siegfried-Stellung was, in fact, not a line but a defensive zone on the whole British front, except, curiously enough, on that northern section between Quéant and Neuville Vitasse which was attacked in April. From Quéant southward it had been observed that there existed a second system about a mile and a half in rear of the foremost and like it consisting of fire and support trenches some 200 yards apart. This was actually the original "Hindenburg Line", the advanced position having been begun in early February to remedy defects in the original siting.² The chief advantages of the new position were, first, that it was sited, as far as possible, on a reverse instead of on a forward slope, and, secondly, the provision of artillery observation posts at least 500 yards behind the front trench, overlooking it and its approaches, and at the same time clear of the smoke and dust of hostile bombardments.

The re-siting afforded an opportunity to lay out on virgin ground, far from the enemy, a position in accordance with the new system of defence in depth introduced by General Ludendorff.

The original first system now became the support position and artillery-protection line. It marked the rear of what was known as the "battle zone" and the front of a "rear zone". When labour became available this rear zone was completed by yet another system, which gave the whole "Siegfried Position" a depth of from six to eight thousand yards. In front of the "battle zone"—

¹ The reasons for the retreat to the Hindenburg Line and the details of the plan are given in Note at end of Chapter.

² This was done at the instance of General Fritz von Below, commanding the *First Army*, and his Chief of the Staff, Colonel von Lossberg. The northern section was on the front of the *Sixth Army*, which did not adopt these defensive tactics at the time.

that is, in front of the new first-line system—there was an outpost zone some 600 yards deep, to deny to the attacker observation over it. In some cases this zone was covered by another strong entrenchment, but its normal defence was a line of piquets supported by squads, each with a light machine gun, in shallow dug-outs. In the battle zone itself there were disposed chequerwise fortified localities containing concrete machine-gun emplacements. The trenches thus became, in theory at least, merely an element in a system of defence which was not linear but zonal.

These defences, though they varied somewhat in different sections, represented the application of mass production to fortification. All the woodwork was uniform in design, the dug-out doors, for example, being turned out to a pattern from the sawmills literally by the thousand. Comparatively shallow dug-outs of ferro-concrete, also to a fixed pattern, were constructed beneath the parapet for each squad, and there were also mined dug-outs. The barbed-wire obstacle was particularly formidable, stretched on corkscrew pickets, generally in three belts, each ten to fifteen yards in depth and five yards or more apart, and, in front of the fire trench, in a zig-zag pattern, so that machine guns firing from the re-entrant angle could sweep the sides. No troops who saw it before rust had touched it will forget the sinister impression made by its blue sheen in the light of afternoon. Observation posts were protected, cable was buried, and a network of light railways was laid to serve the new position.

The demands made by its construction upon labour, material and transport were immense. Russian prisoners were employed to a large extent, though, according to the British Intelligence, for the most part in the early stages and for the rough work.¹ The troops themselves and conscripted Belgian civilians carried out the main portion of the task, though in many cases the ferro-concrete dug-outs and emplacements were made by German firms, who brought out their own skilled workmen.²

¹ By the Hague Rule No. 6 it is laid down that "the State may employ "the labour of prisoners of war . . . the work shall not be excessive, and "shall have no connection with the operations of war".

² In addition to great numbers of barges on the canals, 1,250 train-loads of engineer stores were sent up, and an average of 65,000 workmen were employed daily. However, as the train movement extended from mid-October to mid-March, it represented only about eight extra trains a day, hardly sufficient to excite the curiosity of the British Intelligence Service.

As an extension of the Siegfried-Stellung the enemy constructed another retrenchment, the "Wotan-Stellung", known, as already stated, to the British under the name of "Drocourt—Quéant Switch". This system begun later, branched off at Quéant, crossed the Scarpe at Vitry en Artois, linked the Siegfried-Stellung to the reserve defences east of Lens, and ran on towards Armentières. The British Intelligence was for some time uncertain whether the Germans intended to withdraw to this line at the same time as to the Siegfried-Stellung or to treat it as a reserve position, extremely useful in the event of the loss of Vimy Ridge.

There was no hitch in the programme, which must be regarded as a masterly piece of organization on the part of Crown Prince Rupprecht and his Chief of the Staff, General von Kuhl.¹ It was all the more creditable because the first withdrawal to the R.1 Line was an improvisation and superimposed upon the original plan. But, given that organization, there is no cause for astonishment that it should have succeeded so completely. With modern arms, to break off contact and give the enemy the slip, even in open country and in summer, is by no means an impossibility. To do so after a long period of siege warfare and in the depth of winter is obviously far easier. In this case the pursuit had to cross a zone of morasses, the joint product of shell-fire and rain. The roads were barely distinguishable as such, and at the worst points it was literally impossible to move forward artillery in order to support the infantry until they were in a measure repaired. The enemy, on the other hand, fell back to his prepared positions over comparatively good roads, and sent back first all but the immediate needs of his rear guards. As for the later stages of the pursuit, its pace and vigour were still limited by conditions in the devastated zone, through which communications had to pass.

The very fact that the Allies knew, long before the real withdrawal began, the position and exceptional strength of the Hindenburg Line acted as a brake upon their movements, because it was plainly useless to attack that position until the bulk of the artillery was within range and well

¹ O.H.L. had no part in the details. It moved to Kreuznach, in Rhenish Prussia, only in mid-February (G.O.A. xi, p. 516). It had been upwards of two years in the East, though a skeleton headquarters had been retained in the West and the Chief of the General Staff had paid occasional visits to that theatre of war.

supplied with ammunition. The commander of the British Fifth Army, which took the leading and the most resolute part in the pursuit, had really only one problem : he must be in contact with the enemy in the Hindenburg Line, and have his artillery in position, in time to assist his colleague of the Third Army, when the latter launched his attack at Arras in April. There was no other goal worth the risk of exposing ill-supported advanced guards to heavy punishment, or even of foundering horses and breaking-down mechanical transport on the worn-out and crater-pocked roads. General Gough had, besides, to take into consideration the fact that it would be far from an advantage to scare the enemy off Vimy Ridge and back into the Wotan-Stellung, or Drocourt—Quéant Switch. On the front of the Fourth Army, General Rawlinson had even less reason for haste and more for caution. He exposed himself more in his longer advance ; he was not required to co-operate in the Battle of Arras, except by bombarding the Hindenburg Line ; and his reserve divisions were under orders to move to other parts of the British front.

It might be argued that, had the British troops and staffs been less under the influence of trench warfare and more alert, they would have gained some local advantages over the enemy in the period of the first limited withdrawal. This is possible, though not certain ; but it is scarcely possible that they could, in any case, have accomplished more than that.

THE GERMAN WITHDRAWAL ASTRIDE THE ANCRE VALLEY

After the Actions of Miraumont on the 17th and 18th February, the next important move in the programme of General Gough was to have been the capture of the Butte de Warlencourt, the second of the four steps which were to bring him within striking distance of the Loupart Wood—Achiet le Petit Line.¹ In the early hours of the 21st, and again during the night of the 22nd, the 12th Australian Brigade (4th Australian Division) extended its hold upon Stormy Trench by two brilliantly conducted bombing attacks, capturing 55 prisoners in all.² Both divisions of the II. Corps, the 2nd in particular, had gained a little ground in conditions which, after a downpour of rain on the

¹ See p. 75. This was part of the R.1 line mentioned on p. 90.

² See p. 85.

20th February, were even more appalling than those of the preceding battle.

The 23rd was generally a normal day on the Army front, the enemy's artillery being rather more active than usual against the I. Anzac Corps, less so against the II. Corps, and still less so against the V. The weather was damp and misty. Only on the front of the 18th Division, in the centre of the II. Corps, was there any incident worthy of note. Here, on the afternoon of the 22nd, a daring and resourceful reconnaissance by Lieutenant F. L. Lucas, 7/R. West Kent, conducted whilst British shrapnel was bursting behind him, indicated that, at all events in the division's sector, west of the West Miraumont Road, there were no Germans on the crest south of Petit Miraumont. Next morning this proved to be the case, and several small posts were established on the crest, without coming into contact with the enemy.

Such incidents were not uncommon. In this case, however, there was an added inducement to probe the enemy's dispositions; for two fires, apparently from burning dug-outs, were seen in South Miraumont Trench, below the crest. These hints were the spur which won for the 18th Division, the 55th Brigade (Br.-General G. D. Price), the 7/R. West Kent, the 7/Buffs (which relieved the West Kent on the evening of the 23rd), and the 7/Queen's, the credit of discovering the German withdrawal.¹ Australian patrols, indeed, were equally active that night, but the striking information of various kinds gained by them—that there was only a single post in one trench, that a sap was altogether deserted, and that flares were being sent up from some distance in rear of trenches usually held—was not reported to the headquarters of the higher formations.² From the 18th Division, on the other hand, a telephone message reached the II. Corps at 9.30 A.M. on the 24th, that patrols had passed through South Miraumont Trench and were pushing on into Petit Miraumont.

On the front of the V. Corps Captain C. H. Hoare, brigade major of the 187th Brigade (62nd Division), whose suspicions had been aroused by the quietude of the front, went up to the line in the early morning, and was able to walk out nearly a mile beyond the outposts without drawing fire. On his return, his brigadier, Br.-General R. O'B. Taylor, obtained permission from the divisional commander, Major-General Sir W. P. Braithwaite, to push

¹ The 55th Brigade was holding the whole of the divisional front.

² A.O.A. iv., p. 63.

forward the 2/4th York & Lancaster to the high ground half a mile ahead. The battalion was on the move by 4 P.M. and reached its objective without opposition.¹

Meanwhile, three patrols of the 21/Manchester (91st Brigade, 7th Division) set off at 6 A.M. by different courses towards Serre, reached the outskirts of the village, which was then under bombardment by the British artillery, and moved past them to the Serre—Hébuterne road. They had penetrated nearly half a mile into the enemy's defences without seeing a German or having a shot fired at them. Even their own commanding officer, Colonel W. Norman, who had gone up to an advanced post to await their return, and had seen them crossing the crest-line of the Serre ridge, was so astonished that he wrote: "The above "report seems almost incredible, but I am of opinion that "it is reliable".

Though the party was back by 10.45 A.M., the news does not appear to have reached the V. Corps until 4 P.M. Lieut.-General Sir E. A. Fanshawe at once issued orders on the telephone to all his divisions in line—at that date, the 62nd, 7th, 19th and 31st—to send out strong patrols during the night and to have ready advanced guards, prepared to begin operations for regaining touch with the enemy at 5 A.M. on the 25th.²

The I. Anzac Corps was slower in obtaining information, no patrols having been ordered to go out before 6.30 P.M. though one of the 3rd Brigade, which did not wait for darkness, was able to report at 7 P.M. that The Maze (south of Le Barque) was deserted. When, however, the Australians did move, they did so to some purpose and in greater strength than elsewhere, in response to Lieut.-General Birdwood's telephone order, to occupy without hesitation all ground abandoned by the enemy up to certain objectives laid down, which were over a thousand yards distant on part of the 5th Australian Division's front. In the course of the night, the 2nd Australian Division entered the objective on its front, Gallwitz Trench, while the 1st was equally successful, though it had

¹ Br.-General Taylor records that the Army commander, who constantly visited all parts of his line, came into his dug-out, and, on learning that a battalion had advanced nearly a thousand yards, at first thought that the brigadier had lost his senses. Even if General Gough had already heard of the abandonment of trenches and posts south of the Ancre, that had far less significance than the abandonment of Serre. This appears to have been his first intimation of a considerable German withdrawal.

² See Appendix 17.

to drive out a small German rear guard. The 4th Australian Division was withdrawn that night, its place being filled by an extension of the inner flanks of the 5th and 1st. On the extreme right, the 5th Australian Division found the trenches at Le Transloy apparently held in strength by an active and watchful garrison. This was a fairly clear indication that, for the moment at least, the enemy was not withdrawing beyond the Le Transloy—Loupard Wood—Achiet le Petit Line (R.1 Stellung). Between Le Transloy and Serre, a distance of over ten miles as the crow flies, the British troops were in touch with him scarcely anywhere. He had vanished.

General Gough issued only the briefest orders that night, laying down the boundaries between the three corps in the advance, and bidding them push forward strong patrols, supported, as ground was gained, by other troops, in order to regain and maintain contact with the enemy.

When their first bewilderment had passed, the British troops began to adapt their minds to the new situation, and to experience a feeling of exhilaration at the prospect of following the retreating Germans out of the muddy waste of the battlefield. They were soon to have brought home to them the difficulties of breaking down the resistance of rear guards, specially equipped and carefully organized for their task. The higher commanders were inclined to share their joy, but it was obvious to them that the enemy's retirement, if, as seemed possible, it should be continued to the Hindenburg Line, would provide him with a new reserve, and must have some effect upon the offensive plans of the Allies. It might even herald a strong counter-offensive when they had been drawn into the open. For the moment, the first necessity on the front of the Fifth Army, the only one so far affected, was to discover what were the enemy's immediate plans. This could be done only by pressing after him as fast as was consistent with reasonable care.

To strike the mean between rashness and over-caution was inevitably difficult. On the 25th February, the 2nd Australian Division (commanded by Br.-General J. Gellibrand, in the absence of Major-General N. M. Smyth) was the first to suffer from an attempt to push in swiftly against an enemy who was not yet minded to fall back. The 3rd Brigade (1st Australian Division) had already seized the trenches south of Le Barque in face of consider-

able artillery fire and some opposition from infantry and machine guns. The 2nd Australian Division had established posts round Warlencourt before dawn. On the assumption that Malt Trench, the last position in front of the R.1 Stellung at Loupart Wood, was lightly held, it now tried to take it without artillery support. The two leading companies of the 5th Brigade, on the right, were at once pinned to the ground by machine-gun fire which caused many casualties. On the 6th Brigade front, the resistance was equally determined, and, though a handful of men penetrated the wire and a few actually entered Malt Trench, they were forced to withdraw, the leading companies in this case, also, having suffered severely.¹ There was no doubt that the enemy was still holding an outpost position in front of the R.1 Stellung in some strength.

The orders issued overnight by Lieut.-General C. W. Jacob (II. Corps) were that the 2nd, 18th and 63rd Divisions should push forward strong advanced guards and establish outposts from the corps boundary with the Anzacs on the Warlencourt—Irles road, through the southern outskirts of Miraumont, to Beauregard Dovecote. When this order was issued, the boundary between the II. and V. Corps ran through the last-named point, but on the morning of the 25th General Gough altered it to the railway in the Ancre valley up to the goods station south of Achiet le Petit. The 2/Highland L.I., advanced guard to the 5th Brigade of the 2nd Division, reached its objective by 9.30 A.M. In the centre, the 7/Buffs of the 55th Brigade, 18th Division, moving rather faster, occupied Pys at 8.20 A.M., capturing seven prisoners. On the other hand, one of their fighting patrols, on entering the southern part of Irles, was driven out of it by shell-fire which began at about 10 A.M., when the morning mist had temporarily lifted. From the fact that some of the bombardment fell upon Irles, it seemed likely that the place had been abandoned, but it was speedily found that this was not the case. Probably the German rear guard had taken refuge in cellars while its own artillery was firing on the village. North of the Ancre, the 190th Brigade (63rd Division) pushed forward to the Miraumont brickfield and Beauregard Dovecote.

In the V. Corps the 187th Brigade continued its advance at 9 A.M. and quickly established itself from Beauregard

¹ The casualties of the 2nd Australian Division for the 24 hours ending at noon on the 26th were 174, almost all, without doubt, due to this attack.

Dovecote to half a mile east of Serre. The 91st Brigade (7th Division) occupied Serre. Not till evening could it find touch in the fog with the 187th Brigade, which it supposed to be in rear but which had actually been east of Serre since the morning. As for the 19th Division, on the other flank, the 8/Gloucestershire (57th Brigade) completely lost its way in the fog, and had to be reorganized at midday; but before nightfall the brigade's line was established from the north-western corner of Serre along the Serre—Hébuterne road. Facing the 31st Division, on the left, the enemy was holding his ground.

On the 25th, the bustling tactics of the Australians had cost them dear and had accomplished little. On the 26th, they met with their reward. The artillery of the 1st and 2nd Australian Divisions came into action against Le Barque and Malt Trench, but several batteries were still on the move when the bombardment opened, and it was not successful in cutting the wire. Both attacks were accordingly twice postponed, on the second occasion till after dark. Meanwhile, however, a small party of bombers of the 3rd Brigade entered Malt Trench at the southern end of Le Barque at 4.30 P.M., and its example was followed by the 2nd Brigade, on its right, at Barley Trench, and by the 5th Brigade of the 2nd Division, on its left, at Malt Trench. Confused fighting went on all night, but by dawn, the 12th Battalion (3rd Brigade) had driven the enemy out of Le Barque and chased him headlong through the neighbouring Ligny Thillooy. He thereupon abandoned the eastern half of Malt Trench, leaving the defiant, but not wholly veracious, notice: "If we not will that you "here, you was not here".¹

Opposite the II. Corps the enemy's resistance was more pronounced than on the 25th. The 2nd Division's patrols found Gréவில்lers Trench, which ran from the R.1 Stellung at Loupart Wood to Irles, strongly held. This trench was protected by undamaged wire, and overlooked the valley across which the British were advancing, so that an attack by daylight upon it without the apparatus of a trench battle—a very powerful bombardment and the use of smoke—was out of the question. The 18th Division made but a slight advance up the Ancre valley before its advanced guard was stopped by machine-gun fire. The 63rd Division was similarly checked in front of the section of Gudgeon Trench, between the Miraumont—Bucquoy road

¹ A.O.A. iv., p. 93.

and the Ancre valley railway. A bombardment of an hour and a quarter by such field artillery batteries as had already moved forward, and three siege batteries including a 9.2-inch howitzer, was carried out at 4.30 P.M., and apparently drove off the hostile rear guard; for the trench was then occupied without difficulty by the 190th Brigade. That night, the 63rd Division, which had had a long spell of heavy fighting, and 2,400 casualties during the month, was relieved by the 62nd Division. The artillery remained in action. The boundary between the II. and V. Corps then became the railway, in accordance with the order issued by General Gough.

At 2 A.M. on the 26th, Lieut.-General Fanshawe ordered the 7th Division to capture Puisieux that day. The heavy artillery, which had been shelling the R.1 Stellung, was concentrated on the village, and bombarded it until 4.20 A.M. The 187th Brigade (62nd Division) occupied the upper part of Gudgeon Trench by 6 A.M., but was unable to make further progress while the troops on either flank were held up. This brigade was under fire for the first time in its career, and had acquitted itself very well. The 7th Division's advanced guard came under heavy machine-gun fire south of Puisieux, and was unable to get forward until the evening. Then the 1/R. Welch Fusiliers (22nd Brigade) forced its way in, after hand-to-hand fighting, and cleared the southern and western part of the village during the night. The 19th Division came up on its left, reaching Star Wood and La Louvière Farm.

It was, however, on the front of the left division, the 31st, that the biggest advance took place, due to an extension of the enemy's withdrawal. During the previous night patrols had found the trenches east of Hébuterne abandoned on a wide front, and by the evening they had possession of them from La Louvière Farm to Bock Graben (1,300 yards south-east of Gommecourt). At this point, the hold of the V. Corps on the German front system had extended a mile and a half to the north in the space of 24 hours.

By this morning it had become fairly evident that it was the enemy's intention to hold the R.1 Stellung for some little time, though, of course, for how long could not be determined, and that he was still maintaining detachments in advance of it. General Gough, at 1.10 P.M., issued orders to his three corps to push back these detachments and establish themselves upon a line indicated on a

map forwarded with the order, from three to eight hundred yards distant from the R.1 Stellung, as a preliminary to capturing that position between Bapaume and Bucquoy. The first attack upon it would, he stated, probably be made by the I. Anzac and II. Corps against the salient at Loupart Wood, Achiet le Petit being attacked later on from the west and south.

On the 27th February, the 3rd Brigade (1st Australian Division) drove parties of the *5th Prussian Foot Guard* out of Thillooy, so that the division had no longer any obstacle in front of it short of the R.1 Stellung. Facing the 2nd Australian Division, however, the north-westward end of Malt Trench was still stubbornly held, and all efforts failed to take it that day.

Nor was much progress made on the part of the II. Corps while the field artillery belonging or attached to the 2nd and 18th Divisions was moving to new positions within effective range of Irles and Gréwillers Trench. A company of the 7/Queen's (55th Brigade) made a renewed attack on Irles before dawn, but was forced to withdraw after a fight at close quarters on the southern outskirts of the village. It was now observed that several houses still standing were loop-holed and sand-bagged. If the enemy were really determined to hold the place, which lay on a steep slope and so could bring several tiers of fire to bear towards the Ancre valley, any attack made without strong artillery support would, at best, succeed only at the cost of heavy casualties.

The V. Corps, on the other hand, extended its gains. The 7th Division cleared the whole of Puisieux after hard fighting with a German rear guard in the church, and the 19th occupied before dawn Rossignol Trench, which ran north-westward from the village. The 31st Division also gained ground, but the 93rd Brigade, on its left, was sharply checked at Rossignol Wood. An attack on the wood by the 16/West Yorkshire was for the most part held up, and such elements as reached the wood were caught by enfilade machine-gun fire and practically destroyed. The troops of the 31st Division finally established themselves slightly further back, on the line of the Puisieux—Gommecourt road. While fighting here was in progress, a patrol of two men of the 18/Durham L.I., the left battalion of the 93rd Brigade, had passed through Gommecourt Park and found the village empty. It was handed over by the 93rd to the 138th Brigade, which formed part of the 46th

Division but was for the moment attached to the 58th. The German retirement had therefore now extended to the right of the XVIII. Corps and to the Third Army.

The 28th February was a day of stagnation. The 2nd Australian Division was faced by thick uncut wire at Malt Trench. It was agreed that the cutting of this obstacle would take two days and that the attack could not be launched before the 2nd March. The II. Corps made no progress of note, and, in fact, the only movement of any importance on the whole Fifth Army front was made by the 62nd Division, on the right of the V. Corps, in the Ancre valley. Here the 185th Brigade, which had relieved the 63rd Division, occupied Goods Trenches.

On the right of the Third Army, the 46th Division had been in process of relief by the 58th and of transfer from the XVIII. to the VII. Corps. Divisional headquarters had already gone, leaving in the line two brigades and the artillery attached to the 58th Division. That division had recently arrived in France and had hardly completed its period of instruction. It was decided, now that the German retirement had extended thus far, to restore the 46th to the XVIII. Corps and bring back its headquarters to resume command of the front held by its two brigades. Before dawn on the 1st March the XVIII. Corps held the whole of the Gommecourt salient, the enemy maintaining himself in a trench which formed its chord.

Two methods employed to move field artillery across the bombarded zone deserve notice. Br.-General S. F. Metcalfe, C.R.A. of the 18th Division, obtained from the II. Corps workshops long wooden troughs with rope grummets at either end. These were dragged into position to form tracks for the wheels of guns and wagons. In the 19th Division, opposite Serre, the C.R.E., Lieut.-Colonel P. E. Hodgson, decided that the quickest method was to lay a decauville track and move guns and ammunition on trucks. Such methods are in themselves sufficient commentary upon the difficulties of following the enemy through a waste. In many cases, too, no form of transport other than pack mules could carry forward food and ammunition.¹ These difficulties might have been overcome more readily had the British communications behind their original front

¹ Lorries were used by the V. Corps for ammunition supply on 8th March for the first time. During the advance through Serre the wagon lines of the LXXXVI. Army Field Artillery Brigade were nine miles behind the guns, and for the last three miles ammunition had to be carried on pack-saddles.

been in better condition. Unfortunately, the thaw already mentioned had affected the roads in the back areas, many of which had been in a very bad state since the last phases of the Battles of the Somme, so adversely that even light cars broke through the thin crust of road metal and were bogged. Many roads had to be closed altogether for traffic ; on others only horse-drawn transport could be permitted ; on others again only urgently required lorries were allowed, special passes being issued by corps or divisional staffs. Worst of all, the railway services were in the state of confusion which has already been described.¹

So far, these problems affected mainly the Fifth Army, but the Fourth and Third, on its right and left, had their own, even though they had not yet begun to advance. On the front newly taken over from them by the Fourth Army, the French had undertaken to leave for a limited time their light-railway equipment, the road-mending personnel of their "Service Routier", and a supply of road metal ; but the personnel was found to be inadequate in numbers, and the road metal did not go very far. The Third Army had been starved during the latter part of 1916 to the profit of the Fourth and Fifth Armies in their struggle on the Somme. It had barely been able to keep its roads in repair, and never to accumulate reserves of stone. The railway disorganization of January then resulted in the complete cessation of the supply of stone, so that there was none on hand to repair the roads after the thaw. Not more than 50 per cent. of the promised stone-trains arrived for some time, and during this period it was found necessary to give up moving ammunition altogether and concentrate all transport, including light railways, on taking forward road metal. Twenty per cent. of the Army's lorries broke down in the process.

The 1st March was devoted by the I. Anzac Corps to preparations for the attack on Malt Trench, and by the II. Corps for a bigger and more important operation to be carried out later, the capture of Gréville's Trench. On the 2nd March, the 2nd Australian Division launched its attack. Wire-cutting had been carried out all the previous day, the divisional artillery having fired 4,000 rounds. The 88th Siege Battery had employed the efficient "106" fuze, and two medium trench mortars had been brought forward to one of the sunken roads to join in the bombardment. Nevertheless, the number of gaps reported appeared only

¹ See p. 51.

just sufficient, and it was "not without a lingering doubt" that Br.-General E. A. Wisdom, commanding the 7th Brigade, permitted the attack to go forward.¹

The anxiety proved unnecessary, but by no means baseless; for it was an affair of touch and go. The left was unable to penetrate the wire. Bomb fighting continued all the morning, both on the front of the 7th Brigade and on that of the 5th, on its right, but after a hand-to-hand struggle, in which a formidable counter-attack was broken up, the skill and resolution of the Australians triumphed. Meanwhile, an extensive German raid in the morning fog against the 1st Australian Division at the Thilloys was repulsed after a hard struggle, in which the Australians lost 30 prisoners and the Germans left 45 in their hands.

Local gains on various parts of the Army front were made during the next few days, the most fruitful being the capture, by the 31st Division on the 3rd and 4th March, of Rossignol Wood and the strong position north-west of it.

The only important obstacle to be overcome before the attack on the R.1 Stellung could be launched was now the dominating Gréville's Trench and the village of Irles, which formed a stronghold at its north-western end. Once again, however, a change of weather intervened. The 1st and 2nd March were fine days. On the 3rd, the good weather continued, and it began to freeze. Then, on the night of the 4th, there was a fall of snow, followed by a day of thaw and alternate rain and snow. This was disastrous to the preparations of the II. Corps, as it now became necessary to keep the ammunition lorries off the roads until either the weather improved or the worst of the damage could be remedied. Lieut.-General Jacob, whose motto in operations of this sort might well have been "Thorough", and who believed firmly in the most careful preparations, therefore decided that his attack on Gréville's Trench could not be carried out before the 10th. That would be soon enough for General Gough, who had informed the Commander-in-Chief that it was his intention to attack the R.1 Stellung about the 13th. This line of defence was already under bombardment by the heavy artillery. Meanwhile, in the early hours of the 6th March, the 8/Suffolk (53rd Brigade, 18th Division) captured Resurrection Trench, west and north-west of Irles. The left of the V. Corps had by this time pushed forward to within striking-distance of the R.1 Stellung, and on the right of the Third Army, the

¹ A.O.A. iv., p. 99.

46th Division held Biez Wood, within half a mile of that line at Bucquoy. On the 7th March, this division was transferred from the XVIII. Corps to the V., and thus from the Third to the Fifth Army.

THE GERMAN WITHDRAWAL TO THE R.2 LINE

The attack on Grévillers Trench and the village of Irles Map 2. was carried out at 5.15 A.M. on the 10th March by the 99th Sketch 3. Brigade (Br.-General R. O. Kellett), the left brigade of the 2nd Division, and the 53rd (Br.-General H. W. Higginson), the right brigade of the 18th Division. Each had two battalions in first line: the 99th Brigade, the 1/R. Berkshire and the 1/K.R.R.C., the 53rd, the 8/Suffolk and 10/Essex. The wire had been effectively cut, and the artillery support was extremely powerful, the heavy artillery of the I. Anzac and V. Corps assisting that of the II.¹ As for the field artillery, though the whole objective was only about 3,200 yards in length, there were available the artillery of four divisions—the 2nd, 17th, 18th and 63rd—and three Army field artillery brigades. The 18-pdr. barrage, lifting at the rate of 100 yards in four minutes, consisted of 84 guns on the 2nd Division's front and 80 on that of the 18th. Twelve more 18-pdrs. concentrated on the dangerous ravine known as the "Lady's Leg", their fire moving through it with the rolling barrage. That of twelve 4.5-inch howitzers also moved through this ravine, but 100 yards ahead of the barrage. A machine-gun barrage conformed to the movement of that of the 18-pdrs., but kept 300 yards ahead of it. The ground could not have been better suited to an overhead machine-gun barrage. Indeed, this appeared to be a situation in which observed fire would be more profitable than indirect. It was, however, fortunate that the temptation to use the former was resisted; for the morning turned out foggy. Irles itself, except for the north-eastern outskirts, was not directly attacked, the southern portion of the village being kept under continuous fire by twelve 4.5-inch howitzers. Meanwhile, every known or suspected hostile battery position was engaged by the heavy artillery and, on their own fronts, by that of the I. Anzac and V. Corps. The whole artillery programme was co-ordinated by Br.-General A. D. Kirby, C.R.A. II. Corps.

¹ The heavy artillery of the II. Corps was the same as that for the actions of Warlencourt (see p. 76), except that one 4.7-inch battery, one 60-pdr. and one 8-inch howitzer had been transferred to other corps.

The enemy was overwhelmed. The experienced British infantry, moving across comparatively firm ground, clung so close to the barrage that in many cases the German machine-gun crews were caught in the act of mounting their guns.¹ There was no hostile barrage,² and the wire-cutting had been particularly well done. Except on the extreme right at Loupart Wood, where the 99th Brigade suffered fairly heavy loss, in the Lady's Leg, and in the orchards at the north-west side of Irles, no serious resistance was offered by the German infantry. Owing to the weakness of the 1/K.R.R.C., one company of the 23/Royal Fusiliers had been attached to it to deal with the Lady's Leg. Advancing on either side of the ravine, which was swept by the fire of Lewis guns and Stokes mortars, this company captured or killed the whole garrison, about fifty strong. The objective was everywhere attained. One serious difficulty which had been foreseen was that of establishing outposts, to cover the consolidation of Grévillers Trench, on a smooth slope overlooked by the enemy in the R.1 Stellung. The 99th Brigade provided for this by having a series of shell-holes made by 6-inch howitzers on a rough line some 200 yards beyond Grévillers Trench. When the barrage lifted these were occupied by Lewis-gun sections, already told off for the purpose. The 2nd Division captured 215 prisoners and seven machine guns; the 18th, 154 prisoners and ten machine guns. The casualties of the 99th Brigade, including those suffered in a bombardment during the period of consolidation, were 24 killed and 170 wounded; those of the 53rd Brigade, approximately 30 killed, 34 wounded and 4 missing.

The action was a notable example of the methods then recently adopted for an attack of limited scope, in which the artillery left the least possible burden upon the infantry's shoulders. Yet from the artillery point of view it had been conducted under unfavourable circumstances. The heavy batteries had had to move forward in bad weather on very bad roads—one 9.2-inch howitzer battery having been

¹ The 53rd Brigade issued diagrams illustrating the burst of shrapnel. It showed that behind a barrage fired over his head the infantryman was relatively safe when the shell burst straight above him, but that with an oblique barrage, such as was largely employed in this enveloping attack, it was necessary to keep 75 yards outside the burst, to allow for the lateral spread.

² The absence of a hostile barrage was doubtless due in part to effective British neutralizing fire, but there was a barrage on the front of the 62nd Division, on the left of the 18th. This was believed to be an error due to unskilled interrogation of a British prisoner.

dragged across country by caterpillar tractors—and the supply of ammunition had been, as it usually was in such conditions, even more difficult than the movement of the guns.

The next step was to be the capture of the R.1 Stellung, but it soon became doubtful whether the enemy would stand and endure another such blow. In fact, reports from prisoners and other sources all pointed to his withdrawal not merely to the R.2 Stellung, but within a short time to the Hindenburg Line itself. Fires were burning in villages east and south-east of Bapaume, and even in some behind the R.3 Stellung, or Beugny—Ytres Line. There was a significant report that the headquarters of the Bavarian Crown Prince had been withdrawn to Mons.¹ It was also known that civilians were being evacuated, dumps of stores removed, and batteries on some parts of the front reduced to one or two guns.

The 11th March was fine, with a little rain, but good visibility, and was the first day in March of which that could be said. Bombardment and wire-cutting were carried out that day and the next, about 7,600 rounds being fired by the heavy artillery of the II. Corps alone. The defences were so strong that they could not well be attacked without this preliminary bombardment, but there was some anxiety lest it should scare the Germans out of the R.1 Stellung. It came to pass that it did so. During the night of the 12th British patrols found this line of defence evacuated between Bapaume and Achiet le Petit. The enemy's system of switch trenches enabled him for the moment to maintain his hold on the R.1 Stellung on either side of this section, while retiring to the R.2 within it. As a fact, he had actually withdrawn from the central section during the night of the 11th, and the British bombardment of the 12th had been wasted on small posts, whose chief duty was to send up flares.

On the right of the Fifth Army, the I. Anzac Corps, which now had only the 5th and 2nd Australian Divisions in line, was faced on its right by an unchanged situation. In front of the 2nd Australian Division, on the left, however, patrols pushed rapidly forward through Gréville, and

¹ Curiously enough, though the headquarters did move there, it was not until 14th March, eleven days after this report had appeared in the G.H.Q. Intelligence Summary (Rupprecht ii., p. 115). Doubtless this anticipation of the move was founded on the reports of agents who had noted the preparations at Mons, or even observed that part of the Staff had taken up its quarters there.

by daylight on the 18th March were close up to the strong and untouched R.2 Stellung. The 2nd Division of the II. Corps passed its patrols through Loupart Wood, and soon afterwards had a battalion digging in on the Gréwillers—Irles road. The 18th Division also pushed forward, and found the enemy active and alert in his new line of defence.

Lieut.-General Fanshawe (V. Corps) had, prior to the German withdrawal, issued orders for the capture of Bucquoy. This task was assigned to the 7th Division, which was to relieve the 81st, and to the 46th, supported by four divisional artilleries, three Army field artillery brigades, and about 150 heavy guns and howitzers. The intention was that the operation should be carried out on the 15th simultaneously with that against Loupart Wood, which, as we have seen, did not take place. It now seemed probable that the enemy might abandon Bucquoy, and the line in which it formed a redoubt, at any moment. Between 12.30 and 1 P.M. on the 18th, Lieut.-General Fanshawe issued instructions on the telephone, later confirmed by telegraph, to the 7th and 46th Divisions, that if Bucquoy were not previously occupied it would be attacked that night. Major-General G. de S. Barrow (7th Division) urgently requested that the operation should be put off till dawn, when he thought it would stand a better chance of success; but this request was refused. However, on the demand of the commander of the 91st Brigade, the hour of the assault was postponed from 11.45 on the 18th to 1 A.M. on the 14th, when the moon, full on the night of the 8th, would be up. The heavy artillery bombardment from 10 to 10.30 P.M. was, however, left unaltered.¹ Major-General W. Thwaites (46th Division) also protested strongly, and pointed out that the brigade which was to carry out his part of the attack was then out on the training-ground. Patrols which approached the enemy's position that afternoon found that it was strongly held, that the garrison was alert, and that the wire appeared thick.

The attack was carried out by the 91st Brigade (Br.-General H. R. Cumming) of the 7th Division against the mile-long village of Bucquoy, and by the 137th Brigade (Br.-General J. V. Campbell), of the 46th, against the defences north-west of it and the high ground to the north,

¹ In the view of the commander of the 91st Brigade, the effect of this isolated bombardment was to put the enemy on his guard. He had then ample time to make his arrangements for meeting an attack.

behind a barrage moving at the rate of 100 yards in four minutes. The ground was a morass after a wet evening, and it appears that the assaulting battalions of the 91st Brigade, the 22/Manchester and 2/Queen's, had not quite completed their forming up by zero hour. The affair was even more difficult from the point of view of the 137th Brigade; for, in its case, the 1/5th South and the 1/5th North Staffordshire were back at Souastre, where they were practising for this attack on the assumption that it would take place on the 15th. They had to march at least eight miles in the rain, and were often held up by transport on the road. When they reached Biez Wood, it was found that the lengths of piping filled with explosive, which had been stacked there for use in cutting the wire, had not been assembled—again, of course, because the attack had not been expected to take place so soon. Unfortunately, there was no time to prepare them at this stage.¹ The forming-up was also hurried, but that of the leading waves was effected in time.

The assault was gallantly pressed. The sky was, however, thickly overcast, so that the moon gave no help in finding the few gaps in the wire. At two or three points parties penetrated the wire, but in each case they were forced to withdraw after they had expended their bombs. The attack thus failed completely, with heavy loss. The casualties of the 91st Brigade were 48 killed, 122 wounded and 92 missing; those of the 137th Brigade, 15 killed, 179 wounded and 118 missing.

It is seldom that, in comparing two attacks such as those against Irles and Bucquoy—each against a ruined village and a section of earth-works, each conducted by two brigades of different divisions—one finds it so easy to realize why one succeeded and the other failed. The losses suffered at Bucquoy were not high by comparison with those of major actions, but they had a more depressing effect upon the troops engaged.

Meanwhile, there had been found in Loupart Wood a document of great importance, which for the first time revealed the procedure of the Alberich scheme. Its date was the 5th March, and it therefore did not envisage the abandonment of the Loupart Wood Line, which had been

¹ "Bangalore torpedoes", as they were called, were used—less often in attacks than in small raids, where it was not desired to alarm the hostile garrison by preliminary wire-cutting with artillery—to blow lanes in belts of wire. They were in sections for convenience of carriage, and two or three of these, according to the depth of the wire, could be jointed together.

decided on the spur of the moment ; but it did show that the retreat to the Hindenburg Line was to be carried out in three " Marching Days ". It might also be inferred from one paragraph that the first " Marching Day " was the 13th.¹ If that were so, it was clear that the abandonment of the Loupart Wood section of the R.1 Stellung had taken place not more than 24 hours earlier than had been planned, and that the second stage of the withdrawal was then in progress.

During the night of the 14th March it was learnt that opposite the Fourth Army the Germans had withdrawn from their front line in the salient of St. Pierre Vaast Wood, and by the morning of the 16th that British patrols had reached the eastern edge of the wood, a mile from their old line. That night patrols were generally greeted with machine-gun fire and bombs, but before dawn on the 17th it was discovered that on the whole of the Fifth Army front and the right wing of the Third the enemy was gone. The real retreat had begun.

NOTE

THE CAUSES AND METHODS OF THE GERMAN WITHDRAWAL

In broad outline, both the German plan for early 1917 and its translation into action, the retreat to the Hindenburg Line, are simple. In order to economize troops, both for the purposes of rest and training and for the provision of reserves, the enemy planned, and carried out in March, a withdrawal to a previously prepared line of defence extending from the neighbourhood of Arras, through St. Quentin, to Laffaux (6 miles north-east of Soissons).² By this withdrawal, which was completed by the 19th March, he eliminated two salients in his line : that between Arras and Bapaume, and the very much larger one between the Somme at Péronne and the Aisne at Vailly. He thus yielded up a considerable portion of the invaded soil of France, but, on the other hand, shortened his front by 25 miles, saved thirteen or fourteen divisions, and seriously compromised the Allied offensive then in preparation. Examined in detail, both the problem and its solution are less simple. The one comprised several factors ; the other, after being the subject of grave doubts and

¹ It was actually, as has been explained, the 16th. See Note at end of Chapter.

² The Siegfried-Stellung, properly so called, ran east from Laffaux to Cerny en Laonnois, on the Chemin des Dames ridge, where it joined the front-line defences. The Germans did not, however, fall back to this portion of it. Between Laffaux and the Fort de Condé, south-west of Vailly, they occupied a strong switch, the Condé-Riegel, and east of the Fort de Condé maintained their original front.

differences of opinion, was not carried out quite in accordance with the original scheme.

The hopes of the military leaders of the Entente would have been even higher than they were had it been realized to what a depth of despondency the German higher command had fallen at the beginning of 1917. Germany—and this was even truer of her Allies—had nothing new to throw into the scales to balance the growth of the British Army, the man-power of the French colonies, or, in the outer theatres, the reorganization of the Rumanian Army and the enrolment of Greek forces by M. Venizelos at Salonika. She had, it is true, decided to create thirteen new divisions, but they could be found only by reducing establishments and drawing on reserves, and were rather a technical convenience than a reinforcement. Her hopes of the formation of a Polish Army were doomed to disappointment, as was already realized. Industrially, and in respect of food supplies, she was at a serious disadvantage because the seas were closed to her but open to her enemies, and her importations from neutral countries, though still very large, were being checked by the friendly but steady pressure of the Entente upon those countries.

Even more serious was the deterioration noted in the troops, and the doubt whether they were capable of enduring in 1917 such long spells of defensive fighting and work as had been their lot on the Somme in 1916.¹ Offensive fighting was another matter, and there was better hope that they were capable of that. Was, then, an offensive possible? General Ludendorff calculated that the Entente could hold in reserve on the Western Front 75 divisions, whereas he himself could never have available more than 40, including the thirteen new ones, when ready, and four which he would now be able to withdraw from Rumania.² These figures of themselves put a major offensive out of the question. Secondary offensives, say, on the scale of those carried out by General Nivelle at Verdun, were indeed practicable, and many were discussed. The verdict reached was, however, always the same. Such offensives, though they could be broken off at a few hours' notice, tied down troops and, above all, heavy artillery, for long periods. There was not one of them worth the risks it involved until the plans of the Entente were accurately known. Of these, the enemy was completely ignorant till mid-February. He assumed the Allies would attack because it was natural that they should, now that they had so much reason to hope for a successful decision; but he could only speculate as to where, the reports of his agents being vague and conflicting, and other indications, so far, almost wholly lacking. There were half a dozen of the sections of the front between Alsace and the coast which had to be carefully watched.

The German higher command was therefore gradually driven to the conclusion that on the Western Front it must stand entirely on the defensive, except for very small enterprises, and wait for something to turn up. The decision was distasteful, because it was recognized that "a rigid defensive on the whole front would in the long run paralyze the troops". What it was hoped would turn up was that the submarines would win the War for the Army. Ludendorff was not prepared to accept literally the calculation of the German Admiralty, that unrestricted submarine warfare would

¹ Kuhl ii., p. 60.

² Kuhl ii., p. 60.

have decisive effects within six months ; but he did consider that this would be the case within twelve, which would be before the United States could put an Army into the field.¹ In the spirit of the bold gambler that he was, he banked on those figures. It is, however, significant of the propaganda in which the question was shrouded that a commander of so high a rank as Field-Marshal Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria was told that the period would be three months. In late March 1917 we find the Prince astonished to learn that the King of the Belgians was bringing his son and heir, Rupprecht's own kinsman, out for the Easter holidays, and sending him back to Eton for the summer half. The Channel, concluded the Prince, could not be as dangerous as he had been led to believe.² It was, of course, reasonably safe, and King Albert, it is probable, hardly gave a thought to the risk.

The curious upshot was that Germany was to be saved, not by the submarine to which she looked for victory, but largely by the collapse of Russia, the extent of which she had not anticipated. The German leaders were late in discovering that revolution was brewing in Russia. They, or some of them, realized that there was rather more hope of reaching an understanding with Russia than with any other of the nations with which they were at war. At the end of October 1916, the German Crown Prince—perhaps not an outstanding commander, but with a wider outlook than many who were technically more accomplished soldiers—earnestly pressed for a separate peace with Russia, on the basis of handing over to her Poland and Eastern Galicia. He considered that the attrition of the German troops made such a step a necessity. "This", remarked his confidant, the Crown Prince of Bavaria, "accords fully with my own views ; I also begin to fear that our troops are no longer capable of carrying out major attacks. If we are to bring the War to a successful conclusion, we must therefore come to an arrangement with one of our enemies, so that we can hurl ourselves with our full strength upon the others, and, what is more, upon the most dangerous."³ An effort was made to achieve this object, but it broke down, and it was the revolution which, to her great good fortune, freed Germany little by little, and in the end almost entirely, from the incubus of the Eastern Front.

As a matter of fact, the Siegfried-Stellung was constructed in the first place as a precaution, and the German High Command kept an open mind regarding a voluntary withdrawal to its shelter, apparently changing its views more than once. Originally, Ludendorff considered that the occupation of this retired position would save sufficient troops to enable a considerable offensive to be carried out elsewhere, perhaps in Italy. On closer examination that hope disappeared. O.H.L. also disliked the notion of a voluntary withdrawal, and in the early stages deliberately damped the hopes which subordinate commanders were founding on it. "Just as in time of peace", ran an instruction of the 26th November 1916, "we build fortresses, so we are now building rearward defences. Just as we have kept clear of our fortresses, so we shall keep at a distance from these rearward defences."⁴

Later on, O.H.L. considered as an alternative a much smaller withdrawal, to the Siegfried-Stellung from Arras to Quéant, and to

¹ Ludendorff i., p. 316.

² Rupprecht ii., p. 50.

³ Rupprecht ii., p. 121.

⁴ Kuhl ii., p. 57.

a continuation of the Wotan-Stellung from Quéant to the front at Saily Saillisel. Pressure from the Army Group of Crown Prince Rupprecht gradually induced it not to make two bites at the cherry, but to go back to the Siegfried-Stellung on the whole front.¹

Meanwhile, the Army Group was directed to draw up a scheme, as detailed and automatic in its execution as that of mobilization, for withdrawal to the Siegfried-Stellung. Turning again to the Niebelung Saga, the code word "Alberich" was, with grim humour, chosen for this scheme. And, indeed, Alberich, the malicious dwarf, typified one very important side of the programme: "Der Gegner "muss ein völlig ausgesogenes Land vorfinden". The whole zone between the present fighting line and the new position was to be made a desert. Not only were all military buildings to be dismantled and dépôts to be withdrawn, railways to be torn up, craters to be blown in the roads; but, so far as possible, every town and village, every building in them, was to be destroyed by fire or explosive; every tree, even the fruit trees, was to be cut down, or "ringed" to ensure that it died; civilians were to be removed; and wells were to be filled up or polluted, though not poisoned. This last order may not have come from high up in the military hierarchy, but it was certainly issued. On the British Fourth Army front, instructions were captured, which had been addressed on the 14th March to the 3rd Squadron of the 6th *Cuirassier Regiment*, the divisional cavalry of the 38th Division, then north of Bapaume, bidding it ensure that plenty of horse-dung should be left near the wells—in order, of course, that the pollution might be carried out at the last possible moment.²

Crown Prince Rupprecht objected strongly to the methods and extent of this devastation. Not only was it utterly repellent to his nature; he also disliked it on more material grounds. It would, he thought, give Germany a bad name throughout the world—as indeed it did. He considered that the British and French troops might well find in dynamited houses better shelter than in houses bombarded over their heads. (He might have reflected also that they would find ready to hand large supplies of road-mending material, and, what was no less urgently needed, material for filling up the craters blown in the roads, which would have been lacking had the buildings not been destroyed.) He feared the effect upon the discipline of the troops, and not without cause; for childish barbarities, such as the breakage of crockery and mirrors and the searing with hot irons of upholstered chairs, in houses not destroyed, and the wholesale looting in the few towns left intact, were almost certainly the results of indiscipline and not of orders. His artistic spirit revolted in particular against the destruction of the far-famed and magnificent Château de Coucy. So deep was his repugnance that he was anxious to resign his command and was only prevented from doing so by the representation that this would appear to the world to mark a breach

¹ G.O.A. xi., pp. 509-14.

² In G.H.Q. Intelligence Summary of 18th March it is stated that wells at Barleux, south-west of Péronne, were found to have been poisoned with arsenic. No confirmation of this statement has been discovered. It is well to recall, however, that the prohibition of the use of poison by the Hague Rule, No. 23 (a) extends by analogy to the deliberate contamination of sources of water by throwing in corpses, or dead animals, or excreta, which, in 1914, the British Manual of Military Law described as "a practice now confined to savage tribes".

between Bavaria and the *Reich*.¹ Doubtless his views were shared by many who were not in a position to voice them officially. And if the Army as a whole carried out the work of destruction almost with glee, in the true spirit of Alberich, it is not fanciful to find in the notice posted up in Péronne, "nicht ärgern, nur wundern!", the bravado of an uneasy conscience.

Eventually it was decided to refrain from destroying the houses of Nesle, Ham, Noyon, and one or two smaller places, and to collect in them a number of civilians, who would be allowed to await the advance of the Allies. This measure, however, was inspired not by motives of humanity but rather by the desire to be rid of useless mouths. The ten to fifteen thousand persons left behind were almost all children, their mothers, and the aged. Ten times as many were moved back behind the Hindenburg Line in circumstances of considerable hardship, and these included practically all who were capable of work in field or factory.

Crown Prince Rupprecht was responsible for the whole of the front concerned in the operation. At the beginning of 1917 the German forces on the Western Front were disposed in two Army Groups, with a single independent Army directly under O.H.L. This was the *Fourth Army*, commanded by Duke Albrecht of Württemberg, which held the front from the coast to the River Lys. From the Lys to north of Reims, the Army Group of the Crown Prince Rupprecht held a front of nearly one hundred and seventy miles, with the *Sixth Army* (General von Falkenhausen), *First Army* (General Fritz von Below), *Second Army* (General von der Marwitz) and *Seventh Army* (General von Schubert).² From north of Reims to the Swiss frontier, on a still wider but for the most part less strongly held front, was the Army Group of the German Crown Prince, consisting of the *Third Army* (General von Einem), *Fifth Army* (General von Gallwitz), and the *Army Detachments C* (General von Boehn), *A* (General d'Elsa) and *B* (General von Gundell).

At the beginning of March a change was made. The *Fourth Army* on the coast, now commanded by General Sixt von Armin, was included in Crown Prince Rupprecht's Group, and the Army Detachments on the left flank were linked together to form a new Army Group under the command of Duke Albrecht. At the same time it was decided to transfer the *Seventh Army* from Crown Prince Rupprecht's Group to that of the German Crown Prince, so that the forces likely to be involved in the expected French offensive should be all under one command.

The severe pressure exercised by the British on the Ancre in January led Crown Prince Rupprecht to demand, on the 28th, that a voluntary retirement to the Siegfried-Stellung should be authorized. The present positions, he said, were bad; the troops were worn out, and it was questionable whether they were still in a condition to withstand such battles as that of the Somme. Reports from the Censorship in Germany to the effect that bitter complaints of unceasing work and lack of rest were appearing in correspondence from

¹ Rupprecht ii., p. 118. An article in the "Militär-Wochenblatt", 26th February 1937, admits that fears as to the effect of the work of destruction upon discipline were not unjustified.

² Succeeded in March by General v. Boehn, commanding *Army Detachment C* (see below). General v. Boehn was succeeded in the command of *Army Detachment C* by General Fuchs.

the front, gradually forced O.H.L. to adopt this policy, though it struggled to the last and as late as the 29th January refused to grant permission for the retirement. On the 4th February, however, the German Emperor signed the order. The Alberich programme for the removal of material and artillery behind the new front and for the demolitions required 35 days. The first "Alberich Day" was to be the 9th February; the last, therefore, was the 15th March. The 16th was the first "Marching Day", and the whole retirement was to be carried out in from two to four marching days, according to the distance which the troops had to cover: two days on the flanks, three between Nauroy and Coucy le Château, and four on a small section between St. Quentin and La Fère. This programme was, however, modified in the Ancre sector as a result of continued British pressure upon the *First Army*, which led to a preliminary withdrawal on the night of the 22nd February, followed by a second on the 11th March.

The British Fifth Army was, as we know, preparing for an attack in the near future on the R.1 Stellung between Loupart Wood and Achiet le Petit. It was, above all, the preliminary blow struck on the 17th February—the Action of Miraumont—following upon the severe pressure exercised earlier in the month, that drove Crown Prince Rupprecht to order these withdrawals. His *First Army* was being worn out and fought to a standstill; he therefore could not wait another month. On the 18th, the very day after the British attack astride the Ancre, he ordered the Army to fall back to the R.1 Stellung between Essarts and Le Transloy. As the removal of the artillery would take some days, the infantry was not to start its retirement to the new line, about four miles in rear of that whereon it was now fighting, until the night of the 22nd.¹

It will be seen, therefore, that this early withdrawal was the result of a hasty decision. The Alberich programme had, indeed, begun, but the first weeks were assigned to the removal to the rear of German material and stores; few demolitions were yet visible; and the British were therefore taken by surprise. Their one clue, the intercepted messages on the 20th and 21st February warning the wireless stations to be prepared to move back, had not been impressed upon the troops. For the withdrawal of the 11th March, they were, indeed, prepared, but were in no position to take advantage of it. The success of that retirement eased the mind of the Army Group commander. "I am fully convinced", he wrote, "that we shall be able to reach the Siegfried-Stellung also without much "trouble."²

By this time, indeed, the Germans were less worried, because light had been thrown upon General Nivelle's intentions as to his main offensive. They appear in the first place to have gained some information as a result of the Affair of Maisons de Champagne. Maisons de Champagne was a farm in the French front line near Massiges, and thirty miles east of Reims. On the afternoon of the 15th February, a local attack succeeded, after a very heavy bombardment, in reaching the French third line at this point and in capturing a considerable number of prisoners. French counter-attacks on the 8th and 12th March recovered most of the ground lost and brought in over three hundred prisoners in their turn. The enemy had, however, according to Ludendorff, captured in the headquarters of a

¹ Rupprecht ii., p. 100.

² Rupprecht ii., p. 114.

battalion of the French 2nd Division an order relating to a great attack to be carried out on the Aisne.¹ He concluded that this was the principal attack, and was comforted, the danger one knows being always preferable to the danger that is indefinite. It is not without significance that ten days later O.H.L. informed the Austrian High Command that an Austro-German offensive against Italy was impossible because the twelve German divisions required could not be provided. Ludendorff had dallied dangerously long with this project, which might have led to a German disaster on the Western Front, had these divisions been absent in April during the Nivelle-Haig offensives.² A little later, two German under-officers escaped into their own lines from a French prisoners-of-war camp, to report that there was a great concentration of troops south of Fismes, and that French soldiers had spoken to them of an attack to be carried out shortly between Reims and Soissons.³

The withdrawal was, as may well be imagined, in many respects disagreeable to Ludendorff, who constantly asked himself whether in its course he could not find an opportunity to fall upon the pursuers, inflict a reverse upon them, and wipe out any confession of weakness by a considerable tactical success. It was, however, realized that by the first marching day the Allies would have fairly complete information about the Siegfried-Stellung, and would hardly run their heads into a trap, though the French were more likely to be impetuous than the "somewhat pedantic English".⁴ Once again, the projects had to be set aside or limited to the minor strokes which will be recorded.

¹ Ludendorff ii., p. 410. The French Historical Service has been unable to trace any such order. It points out, however, that the 2nd Division was destined to attack at Craonne (nearly fifty miles west of its present front) under the I. Corps, that the corps headquarters had already moved to this front; and that there had been correspondence between it and the 2nd Division, which was to follow it, relating to the coming operations. (F.O.A. v. (i.), p. 302.)

² See Chapter XVIII.

³ Rupprecht ii., p. 103.

⁴ Rupprecht iii., p. 142.

CHAPTER V

THE GERMAN WITHDRAWAL (*continued*)

(Maps 1, 2; Sketch 4)

EVENTS ON THE FOURTH ARMY FRONT

ON the 17th February, General Sir Henry Rawlinson issued orders to Lieut.-Generals Pulteney, Du Cane and Lord Cavan, the commanders of the III., XV. and XIV. Corps respectively, to carry out three small operations on the 27th. The first was the capture of the enemy's defences at La Maisonette and Biaches Wood, on the left bank of the Somme, on a front of some fifteen hundred yards and to a maximum depth of five hundred. The second was the capture, on a slightly narrower frontage, of the two foremost lines south-west of Moislains Wood, which lay just south of the much bigger woodland of St. Pierre Vaast. The third amounted only to a straightening-out of a slight re-entrant east of Sailly Saillisel. All three promised some advantages in the matter of observation. The chief reason for undertaking them, however, was Sir Douglas Haig's desire that this front should remain active, and that the enemy—who had since January withdrawn three or four divisions facing the Fourth Army—should not be allowed to count upon the Somme offensive having come to an end.

On the 22nd, however, Lieut.-General Du Cane stated that unless the weather cleared by the morrow, he considered the attack near Moislains Wood to be out of the question. He reported that his communication trenches were so deep in mud and water that they were unusable; the going was so heavy that infantry could move only at a snail's pace; and consolidation of the water-logged German trenches would be impossible. Next day, General Rawlinson, taking into account also the state of the roads in the rearward area, postponed all three operations for twenty-

four hours. He finally decided that the XIV. Corps, on the left, should carry out its attack at Sailly Saillisel on the 28th; that that of the XV. Corps, between Bouchavesnes and Moislains, should be postponed until the 2nd or 3rd March; and that that of the III. Corps, at La Maisonnette, should be postponed indefinitely. As things stood, lorry traffic had to be reduced to a minimum and the decauville railways reserved as far as possible for engineer stores—which had first call—and ammunition.

Reports of the enemy's withdrawal opposite the Fifth Army led to vigorous patrolling by the Fourth, but here he was found to be holding his trenches in normal strength, and his artillery was fairly active. Indeed, on the front of the XV. Corps two raids attempted by the 8th Division on the night of the 27th failed in face of heavy fire, and one by the 33rd Division only succeeded after very hard fighting.

Meanwhile the IV. Corps had been relieving the French XIV. Corps between Genermont and the Amiens—Roye road, in accordance with the agreement between the two Commanders-in-Chief. This relief was completed by the 26th, when Lieut.-General Woolcombe took over command of the new sector, with the 32nd Division on the right, the 35th in the centre, and the 61st on the left.

The operation against Palz and Potsdam Trenches, east of Sailly Saillisel, was carried out by the 86th Brigade (Br.-General W. de L. Williams) of the 29th Division (Major-General Sir H. de B. de Lisle).¹ The original object of this attack was to gain observation of the valleys to the north-east and north; to this task was now added that of discovering whether the enemy contemplated a retirement south of Bapaume.

The wire in front of Palz Trench was hidden from view and had had to be cut mainly with 2-inch trench mortars, a slow method which eliminated the factor of surprise. As the objective was commanded at a range of a few hundred yards by a low spur to the north-east, a smoke barrage was put down by two 4.5-inch howitzer batteries and eight 4-inch Stokes mortars to screen the assaulting infantry from this quarter. The divisional artillery was reinforced by three Army field artillery brigades, three 18-pdr. and two 4.5-inch howitzer batteries of the Guards

¹ Since its operation south of Le Transloy in January, described on p. 83, the 29th Division had been out of the line for a rest and had now relieved the 17th Division in a different sector.

Division, and one horse-artillery battery. The 18-pdrs. were divided between two barrages: a creeping barrage moving at the rate of 50 yards every two minutes—a slow rate of progress made necessary by the muddiness of the ground—and a standing barrage on Palz Trench, which lifted simultaneously with the former. For each, there was approximately one gun to 10 yards. The heavy artillery, on the other hand, was on the weak side, consisting of only 10 siege and heavy batteries, as compared with the 40 batteries of the II. Corps in the Actions of Miraumont. In that case, of course, the frontage had been considerably greater, but a thousand yards more or less made relatively little difference to the heavy artillery in actions of this sort, except that it entailed an attempt to neutralize a few more hostile batteries. In this case, although 22 hostile batteries were engaged by the British counter-battery group, the German artillery was not smothered to the same extent as in some of the operations on the Fifth Army front already described.

On the right, the 2/Royal Fusiliers captured its objective without much difficulty, the German infantry surrendering readily. On the left, the right wing of the 1/R. Dublin Fusiliers was also successful, but the left company, and one of the 1/Lancashire Fusiliers detailed to cover this flank, found that the wire in front of Palz Trench had been insufficiently cut, and were held up. The right company then began to bomb down the trench and, when checked because the Lewis guns covering the bombers became clogged with mud, coolly established a block, waited till the guns were cleaned, and then continued its progress. It was, however, not possible to clear the whole trench, and the left company accordingly consolidated Potsdam Trench, the German front line, and blocked a communication trench linking it to Palz. The company of the Lancashire Fusiliers established itself on its objective, after hard fighting, and beat off more than one local counter-attack. A simultaneous attack by the 12/K.R.R.C., of the 20th Division, on Ersatz Point, a mile east of Lesbœufs, lost direction and was repulsed.

The German bombardment, intermittent all the morning, became intense about 1.30 P.M. Ten minutes later the enemy launched a strong bombing attack down Bayreuth Trench. It would almost certainly have been stopped, but that snipers from higher ground picked off bomber after bomber of the Royal Fusiliers and so

disorganized the defence. Eventually, however, a block was formed 200 yards south of the point where Weimar Trench entered Palz, and there the Germans were finally held up. Further counter-attacks on the 1st and 2nd March were beaten off. A bigger one on the 3rd had a measure of success, the Royal Newfoundland Battalion, which had relieved the Royal Fusiliers, being driven back almost to Weimar Trench. The Newfoundlanders, however, immediately counter-attacked and drove the enemy forty yards south of the original block, firmly consolidating their gains.

The prisoners captured numbered only two officers and 71 other ranks, but the enemy appeared to have suffered heavily in killed and wounded.¹ The British casualties were 19 officers and 363 other ranks, a high total but not surprisingly so in view of the ferocity of the fighting.

It was now evident that the enemy had no immediate intention of withdrawing on this front, but several prisoners stated that a retirement to the Hindenburg Line would take place in the near future.

The operation on the XV. Corps front between Bouchavesnes and Moislains was postponed until the 4th March. It was carried out by the 8th Division (Major-General W. C. G. Heneker) with two brigades. Its object was to gain possession of the Bouchavesnes valley and that which forked from it in the direction of Rancourt. The frontage was 1,000 yards, and the objectives comprised the German front and support lines, Pallas and Fritz Trenches. On the right the 25th Brigade (Br.-General C. Coffin) was attacking with one battalion, a second supplying three companies as "moppers up" and carrying parties. On the left the 24th Brigade (Br.-General H. W. Cobham) was putting in two battalions, with a third as "moppers up" and carriers. Owing to the absence of trenches fit to be occupied, the attacking troops were formed up on tapes in No Man's Land under cover of darkness.²

¹ The *71st Reserve Infantry Regiment*, which had one battalion engaged on the flank, had only 73 casualties, but as it lost only three prisoners out of the 73 taken it could only be a minor sufferer.

² As an example of the detail in which trench-to-trench attacks were prepared at this period, it may be mentioned that, as the troops had to lie out two or three hours in the open, a supply of lozenges was ordered, to prevent coughing. The lozenges did not arrive from England in time, so chewing-gum was substituted. The enemy was apparently unaware of the assembly.

The heavy artillery of the XV. Corps, consisting of 18 siege and five heavy batteries, was devoted mainly to counter-battery work, in which it was very successful, largely owing to the use of the new sound-ranging instrument. During the period of preparation the 6-inch howitzers had also been used for wire-cutting with "106" fuzes. This fuze, which was unfortunately not as plentiful as could have been desired, proved as effective as ever, the wire in front of Fritz Trench, where it was employed, being more thoroughly destroyed than that in front of Pallas, which had been dealt with by 18-pdrs. A creeping barrage was formed by 22 batteries of the 4th, 33rd and 40th Divisions, the X. and XIV. Army Brigades R.F.A., and one battery of the 8th Division. That division's own artillery was employed in firing standing barrages on either flank of the attack. A machine-gun barrage on both flanks and in front was fired by the guns of four machine-gun companies, including one which Major-General Heneker had borrowed from the 40th Division.

The assault was launched at 5.15 A.M. in falling snow. There was little resistance by the actual trench garrison, and both lines were quickly captured. Parties of the 2/R. Berkshire of the 25th Brigade and the 1/Worcestershire of the 24th failed to recognize Fritz Trench, overran it, and reached Bremen Trench in the third line, some two hundred yards further on. They then realized their error and returned after dropping gas bombs into dug-outs. The 2/Northamptonshire on the left of the line had no more difficulty than the others in the actual capture of its objective, but immediately began to suffer loss from flanking fire. Next it was assailed by a determined bombing attack from the north. Bitter fighting continued for several hours, especially in the triangle where Pallas Alley entered Fritz Trench. It was a case where the side whose resolution lasted the longer would prevail, and here that side was the British. A fresh supply of bombs brought up in the nick of time by parties of the 1/Sherwood Foresters, enabled the Northamptonshire to wear down the enemy and finally to take his measure. A pigeon message from the battalion sent off at 3.15 P.M. stated that very heavy loss had been suffered, but that two companies of the Sherwood Foresters had been retained in Pallas Trench, and that the morale of the troops was high, despite their losses and fatigue. It ended unconventionally:—"Hun is shelling like hell but has had a bellyful of fighting and is beat".

The pioneer battalion, 22/Durham L.I., carried out extremely good work in digging two communication trenches, both over 200 yards long, between existing saps, under persistent fire. The first of these, giving six feet of cover, was completed by 2 P.M. Another company linked the old front line to the new on the extreme left with a fire trench 150 yards long.

At 4 A.M. on the 5th the enemy launched a counter-attack across the open, supported by another, with the bomb, up the trenches on the right, against the Berkshire. In the former the Germans showed extreme determination, kneeling down and firing when checked by the thin belt of wire which had been put out, until they were shot down. A portion of Fritz Trench was lost, but recovered by a counter-attack. In the evening the enemy was seen forming up again, but the S.O.S. signal was promptly answered by artillery and machine-gun barrages, and the counter-attack was dispersed.

Three officers and 214 other ranks, four light trench mortars, and seven machine guns were captured, and the enemy's losses in his counter-attacks were undoubtedly very severe.¹ Those of the 8th Division were 56 officers and 1,069 other ranks, the three attacking battalions having over two hundred apiece, for the most part incurred after the capture of the position.² Two men who sank to their waists in the mud died of exposure before they could be dug out.

Though the hostile bombardment had been heavy during this action, it was noted that during the first week of March there was a decrease in the fire of 15-cm. howitzers north of the Somme. South of the river the activity of the German artillery was normal. It is interesting to observe, in view of suggestions that the surprise of the German withdrawal crippled the pursuit, that on the Fourth Army front there was no question of surprise, the withdrawal being awaited from day to day; and that nevertheless there was small hope of seriously embarrassing the enemy when he did move. The experiences of the Fifth Army in this respect

¹ The 102nd Regiment on the German left, with one battalion in first line, one in support, and one in reserve, lost 35 killed, 154 wounded and 73 missing, a total of 262. As, however, some three-fourths of the prisoners captured belonged to the 177th Regiment it is to be presumed that the latter's losses were considerably heavier.

	Killed	Wounded	Missing
Officers . . .	16	38	2
Other ranks . . .	183	729	157

had evidently made a deep impression upon the minds of commanders. A note issued by the XV. Corps, on the 3rd March, reflecting the views of Lieut.-General Du Cane and obviously not conflicting with those of General Rawlinson, is significant. One passage runs :—

“ We must not expose large bodies of troops, unsupported by reserves, without entrenchments, and with bad communications, to the attacks of superior numbers. . . . It is clear, then, that for a time at least we shall only be in a position to maintain touch with the retreating enemy with small forces, advanced guards or outposts. These advanced troops must of course be supported by stronger bodies, but these supporting troops will be so disposed that the outposts can fall back upon them if attacked. The general idea will be to fall back if attacked, and not to reinforce the front line.”

On the other hand, Lieut.-General Du Cane ordered the 40th and 8th Divisions—the former of which relieved the 33rd Division on the right on the 9th March—to effect at least one entry a week into the enemy's lines.

The instructions issued the same day by Lieut.-General Lord Cavan were more aggressive in spirit, but gave little more promise of dislocating the German retreat. He had not, he stated, yet received from General Rawlinson definite instructions, but he assumed that the advance would be “ deliberate and by carefully selected bounds ”. He suggested that events on the Fifth Army front gave a good indication of what was to be expected : above all, that the enemy's retirement would be deliberate and covered by strong and energetic rear guards, which would counter-attack in considerable force ; by careful preparation and a good system of communication these counter-offensives could be made to recoil upon the enemy.

It appeared to him from the reports that the difficulties which the British troops had encountered had been in great part due to their lack of training in open warfare ; inter-communication between neighbouring units had failed or had not even been attempted, with resultant delay and unnecessary loss of life. He added :—

“ Initiative on the part of subordinate commanders is to be encouraged, but brigadiers and divisional commanders must keep control of the situation and allot objectives for strong patrols. Objectives once gained must be quickly and carefully consolidated. . . . This type of fighting will afford many opportunities for

"outflanking hostile patrols and minor defensive positions."

The first German withdrawal took place not on the Army's left, but at about the junction of its two left-hand corps, the XV. and XIV. On the 14th March, morning reports stated that the enemy's lines appeared to be held and that there had been some artillery fire during the night. That day, however, fires were seen burning in St. Pierre Vaast Wood, and a forward observing officer of the Guards divisional artillery crossed No Man's Land, to find that the front line trench at this point had been evacuated. Later in the afternoon patrols entered the trenches in Saillisel also. On the left of the 8th Division the front line east of Rancourt was found empty. Opposite the 20th Division on the left of the XIV. Corps the Germans were holding their ground.¹

For the next two days the enemy continued to draw back from trench to trench. His resistance was confined to fire by snipers and an occasional machine gun, and the British did not make any serious effort to break it down. The procedure was to ascertain by means of small patrols that a trench was evacuated before a larger body was sent to occupy it. By the evening of the 16th the new front ran through Moislains Wood, took in the whole of St. Pierre Vaast except the north-east corner, and thence followed Coburg and Gotha Trenches, some six hundred yards east and north-east of Saillisel.

It was in the course of that night that the German rear guards evacuated the R.2 Stellung, which on the Fourth Army front ran east of Rocquigny and le Mesnil en Arrouaise to Vaux Wood.² The 16th was, indeed, as we know, the first Marching Day, and the main body of the enemy was in full retreat to the Hindenburg Line.

EVENTS ON THE FRENCH FRONT

By the 18th March four German Armies, from their left to right the *Seventh*, *Second*, *First*, and the right wing of the *Sixth*, were withdrawing on a front of 110 miles if measured round its two salients or 65 miles in a straight

¹ After the operation at Saily Saillisel the 29th Division had been relieved by extension of the inner flanks of the Guards and 20th. The XIV. Corps, like the XV., was now on a two-division front.

² From this point the R.2 Line was discontinuous. From Vaux Wood a retrenchment ran back to the R.3 Line at Nurlu. South of the wood the R.2 Line reappeared, but only in sections.

line. Following up their withdrawal were six Allied Map 1. Armies: The French Sixth (left wing only), First and Third; the British Fourth, Fifth and Third (right wing only).

The G.A.N., on the British right, which was to attack approximately a fortnight before the great operation on the Aisne, had been under orders to be ready to pass to the offensive at ten days' notice. General Franchet d'Espérey had been ordered to breach the German front between the Oise and the Avre, capturing the zone of the artillery. In case of complete success he was to exploit towards Chauny and Tergnier on the Oise and Ham on the Somme; at worst he must pin down the largest enemy forces possible. He had decided to breach the enemy's defences on a narrow front, between Lassigny and Roye, where the ground favoured a rapid onset, whereas further south the country was hilly and wooded, but to carry out secondary attacks on both flanks. Later on he asked to be allowed to extend the northern secondary attack beyond the Oise, to which General Nivelle after some hesitation agreed. General Rawlinson promised artillery support and also that he would make every effort to keep in line. The plan was, in brief, first, an advance in one rush to the line Thiescourt (two miles south-east of Lassigny)—Avricourt (at the source of the Avre), thus capturing the greater part of the enemy's forward defences; next, the tactical exploitation, the capture of the Champien Wood plateau; and, finally, the strategic exploitation as laid down by General Nivelle.¹

The preparations of the G.A.N. were, then, well advanced when news arrived of the enemy's preliminary withdrawal. At first General Nivelle did not think this would extend any great distance, still less that it heralded a retirement to the Hindenburg Line. As late as the 7th March he wrote that "on the front of the Group of Armies of the North there were no certain indications that the voluntary withdrawal of the Germans would extend to this area", and that he had therefore decided not to alter the general lines of the plan of operations.²

This letter was in reply to one from General Franchet d'Espérey, who was very much of the contrary opinion and who had suggested launching at the earliest possible moment an *attaque brusquée* with the object of surprising the enemy in the midst of his preparations and driving him to a premature retreat. General Nivelle directed that

¹ F.O.A. v. (i.), pp. 242-52.

² F.O.A. v. (i.), p. 390.

the plan of operations should not be modified, though he informed his subordinate verbally that at the first sign of withdrawal it might be possible to force the Germans to begin their retreat sooner than they desired. He gave permission for an attack to be prepared with the object of hastening this retreat, but the operation was to be limited to the capture of the first position.

The proposal of General Franchet d'Espérey had been made on the 4th; the reply of General Nivelle was dated the 7th; and the verbal permission for a limited attack was presumably given later. General Franchet d'Espérey issued orders on the 11th that preparations should immediately be put in hand to launch this limited attack, after a bombardment of 86 hours beginning on the 17th. Had he obtained permission to carry into effect his own project, he contemplated recasting his plans and making ready to launch an attack with the object of establishing himself on the line Noyon—Nesle, within six days. It appears, therefore, that the veto imposed by General Nivelle was unfortunate and prevented a major attack which might well have dislocated the German retreat. Had General Franchet d'Espérey been given a free hand by the 5th and attacked by the 11th, he might have won a sensational victory. In any case he was right in his prophecy; General Nivelle was wrong; and one cannot avoid feeling that the latter's preconceptions and faith in his own scheme warped his judgment and prevented him from adapting himself to changing circumstances. From, "I hope nothing will occur to interfere with my plans", to, "Nothing has occurred to interfere with my plans", has been an unjustified step on the part of many an otherwise strong-minded commander.

The limited attack was too late. It was observed that the enemy had ceased to repair his trenches and wire and that his artillery replied feebly. From a score of villages plumes of smoke were rising; in the valley of the Oise the roads radiating from Noyon had been flooded; and bridges had been cut on the railways. On the night of the 12th March patrols entered the enemy's trenches at several points. By the evening of the 16th the French occupied the whole of the German first position and a proportion of the intermediate position in the centre of the G.A.N. Then on the 17th the enemy, who had hitherto held firm north of the Avre, fell back there also. On the 18th the patrols of the Sixth Army discovered that the movement had

spread to the left wing of the G.A.R., and that the defences north of Soissons had been evacuated.¹

THE RETREAT TO THE HINDENBURG LINE
17TH-28TH MARCH

OPPOSITE THE FOURTH ARMY

On the 17th March Sir Douglas Haig held an Army Commanders' conference to discuss the problems created by the enemy's withdrawal. He pointed out that in August 1914 the Germans had retired in face of the French offensive south-east of Metz to a previously prepared position, from which they had counter-attacked with great success; he considered it possible that they might now intend to use the Hindenburg Line for the purpose of a counter-attack after an unsuccessful Allied attack upon it; on the other hand, they might use the reserves with which it had provided them for a counter-stroke on one of the flanks of the retrenchment; and of these two flanks that in Flanders was a British responsibility. General Sir Herbert Plumer, commanding the Second Army, informed him that there had been no change in the situation on his front, and no indication that the enemy intended to attack.

The Commander-in-Chief went on to say that at their recent meeting in London General Nivelle had stated his intention of delivering his main attack on the Aisne without any change. At the same time he was preparing attacks further east in Champagne in which he intended to employ troops which might be released by the German retirement in front of the G.A.N.²

With regard to his own plans, Sir Douglas Haig stated that preparations would be pushed on for the Arras—Vimy offensive, to which the greatest possible strength would be directed; at the same time he must watch the situation in Flanders, and he intended to hold in his own hands behind the First Army a reserve available either to exploit success east of Arras or to reinforce the Second Army in Flanders; meanwhile, in case the Arras offensive resulted only in

¹ F.O.A. v. (i.), p. 407.

² The meeting was that of 13th March (see p. 58), at which the relations between the two Commanders-in-Chief and the duties of the British Mission were defined. It will be observed that it was between 7th March (see p. 125) and the 13th that General Nivelle had become convinced that on the front of the G.A.N. the enemy was about to retire to the Hindenburg Line.

the formation of a pocket instead of in a break-through, the Second Army was to continue its preparations for the capture of the Messines Ridge. He touched upon the disposal of the divisions and heavy batteries made available by the shortening of the Fifth Army's line and its changed rôle, but did not give a definite decision on that point. It is to be noted, however, that he had no intention of reinforcing the Second Army beyond the addition of the one division—the 19th—already allotted to it, before the 15th April and then only for offensive purposes. The only question regarding these surplus divisions and batteries was in what proportion they should be allotted to the Third and First Armies or remain in reserve to the Fifth Army to assist the Arras attack.

Of the pursuit he had little to say, beyond insisting that advanced guards should work their way forward in small bodies and that thick skirmishing lines should be avoided. He approved of General Sir Henry Rawlinson's plan of following the enemy with advanced guards covered by the mounted troops attached to each army corps, of establishing his line on the Somme south of Péronne and the Canal du Nord further north, and of not committing any considerable forces east of that line until his communications up to it were established.

G.H.Q. had actually on the previous day, the 16th March, issued instructions for a preliminary readjustment of reserves. The Commander-in-Chief intended to withdraw in all three divisions from the Fourth Army and six from the Fifth. Of these nine divisions four, to come under the XVIII. Corps, were to form a reserve to the Third Army, and three, under the VIII. Corps, were to be allotted to the First Army for the exploitation of success at Vimy and to cover the left of the Third Army in its advance on Cambrai. The latter were also to be available either to reinforce the Third Army for the exploitation of its success or the Second Army if threatened by a hostile attack. A G.H.Q. reserve, under the II. Corps, was to be formed of the remaining two divisions in the First Army area; and a second G.H.Q. reserve, under the XIV. Corps, in the Fourth Army area, of two divisions formerly under General Rawlinson's orders. The distribution of the British forces by Zero day would then be: Fourth Army, nine divisions plus two in G.H.Q. reserve; Fifth Army, six divisions; Third Army, 18 divisions; First Army, 13 divisions plus two in G.H.Q. reserve; and Second Army, 13 divisions—

a total of 63, including the 42nd, which had just arrived from Egypt, and the Portuguese.

Thirty-seven heavy and siege batteries and two 12-inch howitzers were to be transferred from the Fourth and Fifth Armies to the First and Third, in addition to 50 heavy and siege batteries already under orders to move. Fifteen Army field artillery brigades were similarly to be transferred to the offensive front.

The gist of the Commander-in-Chief's instructions regarding the pursuit of the enemy was that, while opportunities of inflicting loss upon him should be seized, attacks in force were unlikely to give adequate returns; they should therefore be resorted to only for some special object and then well prepared and supported by artillery.¹

Between the 17th and 20th March the Fourth Army advanced comparatively rapidly along its whole front. General Rawlinson's intention was that, while the forward movement of the vanguards should be continuous, that of the main body of the Army should be made in a series of bounds. He would establish as his line of resistance, first, his old front line position; secondly, the Somme and the Canal du Nord; and finally, when he considered it safe to do so, a position in touch with the enemy in the Hindenburg Line. The IV. Corps on the right had made arrangements to co-operate with the French attack. This, it will be recalled, was to have taken place on the 18th after a preparation of 36 hours beginning on the 17th. The original intention of General Franchet d'Espérey was that the French XIV. Corps on the left of the Third Army, after reaching Fresnoy les Roye, should advance in a north-easterly direction, its left flank on the Chaules—Nesle railway line at Curchy, with the object of cutting off the enemy in the northern half of the Roye salient. The indications of the German withdrawal, including those obtained from a successful raid by the British 48th Division at La Maisonette on the night of the 16th, brought about two changes in this plan. In the first place the bombardment was reduced and the French Third Army began to advance on the 17th. In the second, as there was now obviously no prospect of cutting off the enemy, the French decided to advance in a more easterly direction. By agreement with the British Fourth Army, the boundary for the pursuit now ran from the point where the Amiens—Roye road crossed the old front line, just south of Nesle,

¹ O.A.D. 337 is given in Appendix 22.

through Offoy on the Somme, and thence to the Hindenburg Line at St. Quentin.

Only the Fourth Army had to deal on a large scale with the problem of bridging during an advance. From the right flank at Offoy to Péronne the Somme ran roughly parallel to the front. It was a very formidable obstacle, with a canal following the left bank, the main stream under the right, and in between them marshy ground, cut in places by narrow channels with osier beds. Every bridge had been destroyed by the enemy. The roads crossed the marsh on causeways, which banked up the water into pools nearly half a mile wide. Where there were mills, as at Offoy, Béthencourt and Brie, there had been bridges over the millpond and spillway, as well as over the floodwater channels already mentioned, the canal and the main stream. Crossings were practicable only where the causeways existed. To make a new way, as the Germans had done at Rouy le Grand, would have entailed the construction of a fresh causeway as well as of at least three bridges.

At Péronne the Somme curls westward toward the Channel. The left flank of the Army, the XV. and XIV. Corps, had in front of it the Somme's tributary, the Tortille, and the unfinished Canal du Nord, whose alignment here followed its bed. Although the bowstring girder bridges of the canal had been dropped on to their abutments and the brick arches over the stream had been cut, neither the canal nor the Tortille formed an obstacle in any way comparable to that of the Somme. The crossings over the other small tributaries flowing westward into the Somme, the Germaine, the Omignon and the Cologne, had also been destroyed. As these streams ran roughly parallel to the lines of advance, the crossings had to be re-established for the sake of lateral communication, but did not represent a very urgent problem.

The principle in bridging an obstacle such as the Somme was that bridges for infantry and perhaps pack animals should be thrown first; that these should be followed by pontoon or trestle bridges to take regimental transport and field artillery; and that finally heavy bridges—preferably the steel bridges kept in the Base Park at Havre, though heavy timber would also serve, especially if the enemy left stores of it behind—should be made for the passage of heavy artillery and mechanical transport. Obviously, it was good policy to build the light and medium

bridges close to the demolished bridges which they were replacing but not exactly on their sites, so that they would not have to be removed in order to make room for the heavy bridges. This was generally, though, as will appear, not always, carried out. The R.E. Base Park was responsible for the delivery of the steel bridges to railhead at 72 hours' notice. There was neither personnel nor transport belonging to this bridging material, but some 30 per cent. of the officers and men of the Army Troops companies had been trained in its erection at the Bridging School at Aire.¹

As the result of a conference of the Chief Engineers held by Major-General S. R. Rice, the Engineer-in-Chief, it was arranged that the first reconnaissances were to be the duty of the divisional engineers, that one of the corps' Chief Engineers should be placed in control of the bridging material from the Base, that an Army Troops company in each corps should be responsible for its erection, and that estimates of requirements should be prepared and transport from railhead arranged. Actually, the German retirement had begun before any instructions based on these decisions were issued.

Some instances will illustrate the nature of the work. On the front of the III. Corps the line of the 48th Division overlooked the Somme at Péronne, so that any advance involved the immediate bridging of the river. When news of the enemy's retirement reached the C.R.E., Lieut.-Colonel V. Giles, he issued orders for the divisional bridging equipment to be brought up to Frise. On the night of the 15th the canal was reconnoitred. On the night of the 16th the six pontoons were towed from the lock at Buscourt, where they had been launched, and at Sormont Farm² rafts were formed and loaded with the superstructure. The night was very dark and cold. The canal was full of snags; tree trunks had to be sawn through, and ice an inch and a half thick had to be broken, with the enemy only a quarter of a mile away. The journey of a mile took four hours.

Work was begun early on the morning of the 17th, and by noon the floating bridge of 60 feet across the canal was complete. That evening a company of the 1/8th R. Warwickshire crossed the canal by the bridge and was ferried

¹ That this training was effective is shown by the fact that the 214th Army Troops Company R.E. erected a class "A" girder bridge at Voyennes in 32 hours, eight hours less than the Bridging School's scheduled time.

² This farm, near the junction of the Canal de la Somme and the Canal du Nord, is shown on Map 1 by the letters "Fm."

across the river on pontoon rafts. It was the first unit to enter the once beautiful little city of Péronne, now a pitiable sight, the fronts of nearly all its old houses having been blown out.

The heavy timber piles of the river bridge had been destroyed to the water-line by fire and explosives, but the shore bays on either bank were fairly sound. The 475th Field Company R.E. simultaneously prepared a raft for ferrying field artillery—the first battery arriving at 7.30 A.M. on the 18th—and built a new bridge on the piles of the old one, with four pontoons in the centre bays. This was completed at 3.30 P.M.

Major-General R. Fanshawe, commanding the 48th Division, demanded bridges at La Mire Farm and La Chapelette, a heavy bridge on the main road south of Péronne, and various footbridges. By the 24th, that is, in the course of ten days, the three field companies of the 48th Division, with their infantry working parties, had built some six footbridges, three horse-transport bridges, and a heavy timber bridge from local material, without help from any Army Troops company.

On the right flank of the III. Corps the 1st Division had to cover three miles before reaching the Somme. On the 18th March the infantry of the 3rd Brigade built a rough footbridge at Brie and formed a bridgehead to cover the work of the engineers.

The crossing at Brie was by far the most important, because it carried the main Amiens—St. Quentin road over the river. Its reconstruction also entailed the greatest amount of work. There were in all six gaps to be bridged: the canal, the canal flood-water channel, the millstream, the mill spillway, a breach blown in the six-hundred-yard causeway, and the river itself.¹ Working through the night by the light of bonfires and using local material, the engineers of the 1st Division completed the crossing for horse transport by 5 A.M. on the 20th, twenty-four hours after work had been begun, a remarkably fine achievement.

On the 21st the heavy bridging material arrived by barge at Cappy and by rail at La Flaque, nine and ten miles respectively from Brie, and was delivered by road.²

¹ In 1415 the French dug pits in the causeway at Voyennes, and Henry V. put his pioneers to work to fill them in before he crossed, to go north to Agincourt.

² It was brought by lorries with trailers from Cappy and by horsed trestle wagons from La Flaque. The truck carrying the bolts was cut off the train at Amiens by French railway officials, which caused some delay.

To make way for it the medium bridge had to be dismantled and a deviation bridge thrown to take traffic in the meantime; but as there was no room for the deviation bridge at the mill spillway, traffic had to be stopped for over twelve hours at one period. This was a good example of the amount of work and trouble which may be caused by difficulties of site in bridging. The breach in the causeway having widened under the scour, a pile dam filled with brick rubble from the houses of Brie was built upstream, and charges were exploded in the bed of the river to guide the water back into the old channels. The roadway, too, was made good with bricks from the village. Had the Germans not demolished the houses, it would have been impossible to obtain material in this way. Three and a half field companies, two Army Troops companies, half a pontoon park, and a large amount of horse transport, working under Lieut.-Colonel C. Russell-Brown, C.R.E. of the 1st Division, had the heavy bridge open by 4 P.M. on the 28th March. This was five days earlier than the Engineer-in-Chief had promised Sir Douglas Haig that it would be ready, but the estimate had been very liberal.

Unlike the divisions of the III. Corps, those of the IV. Corps on the right had to cover a considerable distance on the ruined roads of the battle zone before approaching the Somme, which at Offoy and Voyennes was 14 miles away. On the 18th March the Corps Mounted Troops (1/King Edward's Horse and IV. Corps Cyclists) reached the canal. They were in touch with rear guards of German cyclists, which did not, however, offer a serious resistance. The mounted troops returned for the night to Rosières, leaving no patrols out; on the 19th, however, they repaired the broken bridge at Béthencourt sufficiently to take cavalry. They were followed by part of a field company of the 32nd Division, which had a bridge open for wheeled traffic at Voyennes by 6 P.M. on the 20th.

Not until this day did any infantry of the IV. Corps cross the Somme, though the mounted troops were well east of it at Germaine, in touch with French cavalry at Douchy. The 32nd Division now pushed a battalion across.

Meanwhile, on the 18th, the XV. Corps found crossings over the Canal du Nord and the Tortille at Moislains practicable for field artillery, but was opposed by a rear guard entrenched on about the line of the Nurlu—Péronne road, a part of the Beugny—Ytres or R.3 Line. On the

front of the XIV. Corps, where the Canal ceased to be an obstacle because it ran for a considerable distance in a tunnel, the cavalry found Lechelle clear of the enemy.

The 18th March had been the third and last Marching Day opposite the right of the Fourth Army; the 17th, the second and last opposite its left. The main bodies of all the German divisions were therefore now within the shelter of the Hindenburg Line; but they were leaving behind them considerable rear guards prepared to fight if their programme of withdrawal should be interfered with. It was, however, by this time evident that the programme did not include a prolonged stand upon the R.3 Line; for two villages within it, Nurlu and Bertincourt, were occupied by troops of the XV. and XIV. Corps respectively on the 19th. In fact, though there were still isolated rear-guard detachments in parts of the R.3 Line and even in front of it, this was only because the comparatively slight pressure needed to turn them out had not yet been exercised. Practically speaking, the Fourth Army was now out in the open, with no fortifications except on the outskirts of villages between it and the Hindenburg Line. We now know that on this part of the front the Germans were very much behind-hand with their preparations. The new Siegfried-Stellung which they were digging was in a backward state, and it is just possible that considerably greater losses could have been inflicted and greater confusion caused had the bridging been quicker. Work could not have effected this; indeed, the effort throughout was magnificent; but there were some instances of lack of method. In particular, an officer of the Royal Engineers should always have accompanied the cavalry reconnaissances, and an earlier decision might well have been made as to the site of the first heavy bridge.

By the night of the 20th the infantry outpost line of the Fourth Army ran along the high ground from two and a half to three miles east of the Somme and crossed the Tortille at Manancourt.

On the 21st the west bank of the canal south of Péronne became the line of resistance, but there was little forward movement, even on the part of the cavalry, except on the right flank. Here the 1/King Edward's Horse found Savy Wood and Holnon Wood held in some strength, and in a reconnaissance in force next day one squadron lost 20 men and the same number of horses. The cavalry of the III. Corps, for its part, was driven out of Poeuilly

and neighbouring villages by a counter-attack.¹ The 23rd was quiet, largely owing to the exhaustion of the cavalry horses. The corps regiments were relieved on the evening of the 24th by the 5th Cavalry Division, which had been placed temporarily at the disposition of General Rawlinson and acted directly under his command. Next day these troops reoccupied Poeuilly and also Caulaincourt, where the beautiful château of Napoleon's celebrated Grand Ecuyer and Foreign Minister, the Duke of Vicenza, had been involved in the general destruction. That evening the XIV. Corps headquarters was withdrawn from the line, the 20th Division, which had previously relieved the Guards and extended over the whole corps front, passing to the XV. Corps. The 40th Division of the XV. Corps was also withdrawn.

The urgency of repairing and re-establishing the Army's communications was now so great that each corps in the line was employing at least a whole division, in addition to normal labour, as working parties. The effect of the huge craters blown at cross-roads and of the damage caused by shell-fire and by the thaw was so serious that except on a few roads all supplies had to be carried by horse transport. When the advanced troops got so far ahead that a unit such as a divisional train could no longer bridge the gap, extra horse transport had to be improvised, and on occasion two trains were linked together to supply a forward division.

That there was need for caution was proved by news from the French G.A.N. The French had pressed faster than the British on the heels of the retreating Germans and had been somewhat ahead of the British Fourth Army at nearly every stage. On the 22nd March their cavalry and cyclists, who had crossed the Crozat Canal, linking the canal systems of the Somme and the Oise, were heavily counter-attacked and thrust back behind it, the cyclists suffering serious loss. Though the Allies knew it not, this operation was a bitter disappointment to the Germans. It was the sole major counter-stroke so far permitted; high hopes had been founded upon it; and the passage of

¹ As it seemed possible that the corps cavalry might have to meet an attack by a German cavalry brigade, Major-General R. Fanshawe, temporarily commanding the III. Corps, formed a corps advanced guard of all arms from his own 48th Division on 21st March. It consisted of the corps cavalry and cyclists, two batteries of field artillery, two sections of engineers, and a battalion of infantry, under the command of the C.R.A., Br.-General H. D. O. Ward, and was known as "Ward's Force".

the canal by the French had been eagerly awaited. Now it was found that the attack had been premature and had encountered only covering troops, without artillery.¹

The 26th was marked by two small but skilfully conducted operations. A company of the 1/4th Oxford L.I. of "Ward's Force" (III. Corps), assisted by two squadrons of the 18th Bengal Lancers (Ambala Cavalry Brigade) and two armoured cars, captured Roisel, in the valley of the Cologne; and the Canadian Cavalry Brigade took Equancourt. The refugees in Nesle, for the most part inhabitants of villages which had been destroyed, were evacuated in the empty supply lorries of the IV. Corps, fed, and cared for as well as was possible in the circumstances. On the III. Corps front also the enemy left civilians in Bouvincourt, Vraignes and Tincourt. These people were pitifully grateful, sometimes pressing coffee on the troops from their meagre stores. They had suffered no ill treatment but had endured great privations with fortitude. Their circumstances and attitude were well expressed by the bald tribute in the Army Intelligence Summary: "Their health was consequently very bad, "but their morale was excellent".

On the 27th the cavalry took a step forward, the 8th Hussars of the Ambala Brigade capturing Villers Faucon and the Canadian Cavalry Brigade (Br.-General J. E. B. Seely) Saulcourt and Guyencourt. This series of attacks was executed with great dash, the armoured cars advancing as directly as possible on the objectives, while the cavalry galloped round the flanks. The German machine guns concentrated on the cars, the first targets to come into view, giving the cavalry opportunities of which it made good use. This and other actions proved that, even on the Western Front, cavalry could still carry out small mounted actions, especially in conjunction with armoured cars. The enemy had, however, quickly realized how dangerous were the cars in warfare of this type. Whereas at Roisel they had been bullet-proof, they were here repeatedly penetrated by armour-piercing bullets. It was at Guyencourt that Lieutenant F. M. W. Harvey, Lord Strathcona's Horse, broke down resistance in front of the village by dashing ahead of his men, jumping the wire entanglement, shooting a machine gunner and capturing his gun, for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross.

On the 28th there was no considerable advance on the

¹ Rupprecht ii., p. 121.

part of the outposts, held by the corps cavalry—the 5th Cavalry Division being under orders to withdraw—cyclists, and in some cases infantry. On the other hand, communications had improved sufficiently for the main line of resistance to be pushed forward to Germaine, Caulaincourt, Bernes, Marquaix, Lieramont, Nurlu, Equancourt and Bertincourt, an important step in the advance.¹

The dispositions of the 32nd Division on the right of the Army may serve to illustrate those on the whole front, though this division had established its line of resistance about a mile in advance of that laid down in order to keep touch with the French in Fluquières. The division placed two brigades in line and the third in reserve. Each of the former allotted two companies to the outposts, which ran through Etreillers and Villeveque, and two battalions to the main line. This position was held only by platoon posts in disconnected strong points, the remainder of the battalions allotted to it being quartered in the villages in rear and employed for the most part in work on the roads. The divisional artillery had one brigade far enough forward to cover the outposts and one covering each infantry brigade in line.

The leading troops having advanced 21 miles as the crow flies, the supply of cable had given out. Telegraphic communication was maintained by means of German wire insulated on wine-bottles with the bottoms knocked out, which were fixed on pea-sticks—bottles and sticks having been obtained from Auroir Château.

Supply was now hindered only by the bad condition of the roads and by the craters blown in them, which had not yet in all cases been filled up. The bridging had made good progress. Bridges had been constructed or were to be finished within the next two days across the Somme and its canal at Offoy, Béthencourt, Pargny, Brie and Eterpigny. At Péronne not only this double waterway but the Somme's tributary, the Cologne, had been bridged, and there were further bridges across the latter at Doingt, Buire and Tincourt. There were four across the marshy Ingon which, small as it was, had proved a difficult obstacle. There were several over the Tortille and Canal du Nord, and one at Toulle, north-west of Ham, over the Germaine.

¹ This line, with a slight divergence on the left, was as laid down in instructions from G.H.Q. See Appendix 26.

THE RETREAT TO THE HINDENBURG LINE
17TH-28TH MARCH

OPPOSITE THE FIFTH ARMY

In contrast to the situation of the Fourth Army, it appeared that the Fifth might have a chance of inflicting loss upon the enemy by operating in a north-easterly direction with a view to cutting off the troops south of Arras. For this purpose General Gough decided to employ the Lucknow Cavalry Brigade (4th Cavalry Division), which had been put at his disposal and moved up to Albert on the 17th March. On learning that morning of the enemy's withdrawal, he ordered the brigade to move on the morrow to Achiet le Petit in order to maintain touch with the retreating enemy, reconnoitre in a general northerly direction towards Moyenneville, clear the country between the R.3 or Ytres—Beugny line and a new discontinuous system of defence which appeared to run through Hamelincourt and Behagnies, and endeavour to cut off bodies of the enemy retreating from the Third Army towards the Hindenburg Line. The brigade was to come under the orders of Lieut.-General Fanshawe, commanding the V. Corps.

General Gough had, in any case, as has been explained, a greater incentive to haste than General Rawlinson, because it was necessary that he should reach the Hindenburg Line south-east of Arras in time to co-operate with the attack of the Third Army in early April. Nor had he to face such obstacles as the Somme and the Canal du Nord. For these reasons his methods of pursuit were more vigorous. In the Fourth Army contact with the enemy was maintained almost wholly by the corps cavalry and cyclists—and the 5th Cavalry Division for the period during which it was available. General Gough's intention, on the other hand, was to carry out the pursuit with a column of all arms on the front of each division.

On the right of the I. Anzac Corps patrols of the 5th Australian Division discovered by 6 A.M. on the 17th that the R.1 Line had been abandoned. Its left brigade, the 8th, found soon afterwards that the R.2 Line, which at Bapaume almost touched the R.1 and was linked to it by a short switch, had also been evacuated. The heavy machine-gun fire which had met the Australians in the early morning had now ceased, and they were able to move

straight forward into Bapaume, once so desirable a goal and now of so little account. The seizure of the old fortress and still more the sight of open green fields, unscarred by artillery fire, beyond it, none the less affected the men's minds to an extraordinary degree, even though Bapaume itself was far from being exhilarating. Owing to the extent of the town and the size of the principal buildings, the devastations here wore an air even more appalling than elsewhere, and this was heightened by the fact that many of the houses were still burning. Almost simultaneously the 6th Australian Brigade, on the right of the 2nd Australian Division, entered Avesnes, virtually a suburb of Bapaume.

On this occasion the honour of first discovering the departure of the enemy's rear-guard screen had fallen to the Australians. It was on receipt of a telephone message from the 2nd Australian Division announcing that their patrols were through the wire that the 6th Brigade, which held the whole front of the 2nd (British) Division on the right of the II. Corps, began its advance. Then the 17/Middlesex pushed quickly forward through the deserted trench and reached Biefvillers and Sapignies, though news that patrols were in the latter village did not reach brigade headquarters till the following morning. The 18th, the left division of the II. Corps, had troops of the 54th Brigade in Bihucourt by about 10 A.M., and in Achiet le Grand by 2 P.M. This village was shelled by the enemy as the 7/Bedfordshire reached it, and the battalion was prevented by machine-gun fire from debouching from it until after dusk had fallen.

In the V. Corps the 62nd Division on the right was quickly off the mark, reporting at 8.20 A.M. that Achiet le Petit was empty. Lieut.-General Fanshawe directed that patrols should act "with vigour and boldness", and gave as objectives to his three divisions, Logeast Wood to the 62nd, Bucquoy and Ablainzevelle to the 7th, and Essarts to the 46th. All these were occupied in the course of the day, though the enemy maintained a small rear guard at the north-east corner of Logeast Wood until nightfall.

No country could have been more suitable for operations or presented fewer obstacles to them than that facing the Fifth Army. Its left wing, having passed through the barrier of the R.2 Line, was in open country; and, though its right was still faced by the R.3 Line, it was to meet with little opposition there. Lieut.-General Jacob con-

sidered that with the aid of tanks he could hustle the German rear guards to some effect ; but G.H.Q. had none to spare. They were being kept for the attack at Arras.

Between the advanced guards and the Hindenburg Line there were numerous destroyed villages, but scarcely an isolated building with the exception of a few windmills. East of Logeast Wood there were no woodlands that could be considered more than very small copses. The fields were without hedges and generally without fences. There was a network of roads, though the secondary ones were very thinly metalled and, between the main highways from Arras and Bapaume which converged on Cambrai, ran rather in a north-to-south than in a west-to-east direction. The ground dropped away very gently to the north-east, Ablainzeville being the last village on the 140-metre contour, and Bullecourt, nine miles away and in the Hindenburg Line, on the 90-metre. The rivers, the Agache, the Hironnelle, the upper waters of the Sensée and the Cojeul, and their tributaries thus roughly marked the direction followed by the British advance ; nor were they ever considerable streams or set in deep valleys. It was, in brief, typical Picard country, which, apart from the valleys of the Oise, the Somme and its larger tributaries, and the Bresle, is gently undulating and without strongly marked features.

Though snow had fallen within the past ten days and the country was still wet, good weather, with even an occasional foretaste of spring sunshine, was drying it up. It had been fine now for four days, and until the end of the month there were to be only two more really wet ones, the 26th and 29th. The drying of the roads was very fortunate ; for water lying in hollows and pot-holes is more destructive than a reasonable amount of traffic, and it was the damage done to the roads in the bombarded zone—far more than the craters blown in them or the trees felled across them further east—which constituted the real obstacle to the advance. The improvement in the weather was also even more welcome to the troops now than it would have been during trench warfare ; for the German policy of destruction had left them almost without protection from the elements. Unfortunately, April was to bring a return of very bad weather.

The Lucknow Brigade reached Achiet le Petit at 8.30 A.M. on the 18th and subsequently picked up the 29th Lancers, which had been attached to the II. and I. Anzac Corps.

A Battery R.H.A. was bogged on the bad road between Miraumont and Achiet le Petit, but rejoined while wire was being cut to let the cavalry through. By the afternoon the brigade's patrols had reached the Hamelincourt—St. Leger road, but were prevented by machine-gun fire from crossing it.

The columns forming the advanced guards of the 5th and 2nd Australian Divisions, drawn respectively from the 15th and 6th Brigades, each consisted of a detachment of the 13th Australian Light Horse, an 18-pdr. battery, part of a field company of engineers, two battalions, and machine guns. The rôle of these detachments and those on the fronts of the two other corps in the Fifth Army was increased, as also were their risks, by instructions issued in the course of the day by General Gough. The Army commander directed that the main bodies were to remain until further orders on the line Bancourt—Bapaume—Achiet le Grand—Ablainzeville, and fortify it. This message reflected the anxiety of Sir Douglas Haig regarding a German counter-stroke in open country. In communicating the instructions to the corps commanders General Gough recognized that they altered the responsibility of the columns, which were no longer true advanced guards, but rather mobile columns, because the main bodies would not be following upon their heels to support them in case of need. He therefore suggested that they should be brought up to the strength of brigade groups of all arms.

The right Australian column, vigorously handled by Br.-General H. E. Elliott, outflanked the slight resistance at Frémicourt, on the main Bapaume—Cambrai road, but was fired on more heavily from Beugny, the next village. This, as has been explained, lay within the strong and untouched R.3 Line, and though that system of defence was now held only by isolated machine-gun detachments, the village was not taken before darkness fell. South of it, however, the Australians passed through the wire. The left column, on the other hand, moving through Beugnâtre, met with little opposition on this line. It then advanced so rapidly on Vaulx Vraucourt that, for once in a way, it surprised the enemy rear party, members of which were shaving, and drove it back in confusion towards Lagnicourt.

In the II. Corps the advanced guards of the 6th and 54th Brigades (2nd and 18th Divisions) were scarcely opposed and could probably have made more progress than they did had not Lieut.-General Jacob ordered them

to establish a temporary defensive position from half-way between Sapignies and Mory to Ervillers, as a precaution against a possible counter-attack. By evening, however, the 6th Brigade had a company in Mory.

The objectives of the V. Corps, Gomiecourt to the 62nd Division, Courcelles to the 7th, Alette and Douchy to the 46th, were all occupied at an early hour—Gomiecourt actually at 4.30 A.M., by a company which had pushed on during the night. In the course of the afternoon the 22nd Brigade (7th Division) took over Moyenneville and Hamelincourt from squadrons of the Lucknow Brigade.

The news which reached General Gough during the day from the air was bewildering. He was informed that villages actually behind the Hindenburg Line were burning and that fires could be seen in St. Quentin, where the main line ran east of the city but an equally strong apron enclosed it. What did this betoken? If the British Intelligence had taken long to conclude that the enemy was going back to the Hindenburg Line, it had, nevertheless, not left out of account the possibility that he intended to hold even those defences only temporarily. If so, the whole scheme of the Arras offensive would, of course, fall to the ground. It was more than ever necessary to find out what were his intentions.

At 11.30 P.M., therefore, General Gough issued telegraphic instructions to the II. and V. Corps and the Lucknow Cavalry Brigade. He informed them of the fires east of the Hindenburg Line and directed that the Lucknow Brigade should be pushed forward vigorously on the morrow to Ecoust St. Mein and Croisilles to drive the enemy from those places and occupy them, and that it should throw out flanking detachments to Lagnicourt and Hénin sur Cojeul. He pointed out that it was the duty of the advanced guards, reinforced as he had given permission that they should be, to support the cavalry and drive all hostile detachments back to the Hindenburg Line. This telegram may be read as enjoining a measure of audacity, but it did not order or authorize attacks in large numbers without careful reconnaissance and preparation. By the 6th Australian Brigade, however, to which it was forwarded almost in its original form, it appears to have been misunderstood.¹

As it turned out, the patrols of the Lucknow Brigade discovered on the 19th that Lagnicourt, Noreuil, Ecoust,

¹ Australian O.A. iv., p. 177.

and Croisilles were held in some strength and with numerous machine guns. By the time these reports had come in, it was too late to organize that day an attack with infantry co-operation on Croisilles, where Lieut.-General Fanshawe had directed that an attempt should be made to break through this outpost line. The squadron thrown out to the eastward towards Lagnicourt was unable to approach the village closely, and here there was never any question of the cavalry calling upon the infantry for support.

The right Australian column quickly passed through Beugny, and made considerable further progress before being held up by small detachments astride the Bapaume—Cambrai road. Its patrols, which entered Vélú and Lebuquière, were by nightfall nearly two miles in advance of the Fourth Army's main line at Barastre and well ahead of its cavalry at Bus. The left column, which on the previous morning had been ahead of its right-hand neighbour and of the II. Corps troops on its left, made only a slight advance.

In the II. Corps the 54th Brigade (18th Division), aided by troops of the Lucknow Cavalry Brigade, captured St. Leger without difficulty. On the right, however, the 6th Brigade (2nd Division) was held up in front of Ecoust. That evening the 18th Division took over the front of the 2nd, as a preliminary to the withdrawal of the II. Corps from the shortening line.

At 8.45 P.M. Fifth Army headquarters sent out a telegram, which, after giving the situation on the front of the Army and on the flanks of the Fourth and Third, concluded: "Every effort will be made on March 20th to comply with the orders issued under G.592 of 18/3/17". This was the telegram just referred to, which laid down that the advanced guards were to "support the cavalry and drive all hostile bodies back to the Hindenburg Line". The message was communicated by the staff of the 2nd Australian Division to Br.-General Gellibrand, commanding the left Australian column. He interpreted it to mean that a serious effort was expected of him immediately; otherwise the message would not have been sent to him, as his brigade, the 6th, was due to be relieved that night by the 7th. He was clearly not averse to making the effort, having from the first been eager to put more vigour into the pursuit. He accordingly decided to attack before dawn on the 20th, as with only two battalions and two batteries he could not hope to succeed in daylight.

Three shallow valleys, divided by two spurs, ran north-eastward from the 6th Brigade front towards the Hindenburg Line at Quéant and Bullecourt. In the right lay Lagnicourt, in the centre Noreuil, in the left Longatte. Br.-General Gellibrand decided to pass a battalion along each of the spurs, surround and cut off Noreuil, and protect the attackers by flank guards against interference from either Lagnicourt or Longatte.

The manœuvre was ingenious and one which the fellow-countrymen of those now called on to carry it out, the Australian Light Horse in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, might have brought off; but on troops so newly introduced to open warfare and already fatigued it made high demands.¹ Time was short; the night was dark and wet; and the 21st Battalion on the left was late in starting. This battalion failed to penetrate between Noreuil and Longatte, and, caught by daylight, suffered very heavily from machine-gun and artillery fire. Eventually both it and the 23rd were withdrawn to a line little in advance of that from which they had started, having suffered 331 casualties, including about fifty missing. If the brigade commander had gone beyond his orders, these seem to be open to the interpretation he put upon them; and he received little guidance from his immediate superiors.²

The operation against Croisilles was carried out at 7 A.M. by the 6/Northamptonshire (54th Brigade, 18th Division), with a squadron of the Yorkshire Dragoons on either flank. On the right a squadron of the King's Dragoon Guards, supported by a section of A Battery R.H.A., attempted to enter Ecoust, and on the left the 29th Lancers advanced with the intention of reaching the high ground on the Croisilles—Hénin road. A message from the V. Corps to the Lucknow Brigade, which had been sent off before midnight and did not arrive until 8.30 A.M.—an hour and a half after the advance had begun—promised the support of the artillery of the 18th Division; but actually, in addition to A Battery, there was only C/LXXXII., the battery originally allotted to the advanced guard, and it had only four guns available. When, therefore, after an advance of a few hundred yards had been made, some fifteen machine guns and half a dozen field guns opened fire from the neighbourhood of Croisilles, it

¹ The plan was strikingly similar to that by which Australian troops captured Merris, on 29th July 1918.

² O.A. iv., pp. 177-86.

was decided by Lieut.-Colonel R. Turner, commanding the Northamptonshire, that there was no justification for exposing his battalion to heavy loss, and he called off the attack. He had obtained by this reconnaissance in force, at small cost, all the information that was required. General Gough fully accepted the view of the situation disclosed by the reports and directed that no further attack should be launched against the German outpost line until further artillery had been brought up.¹

After this attack the last division under the orders of the II. Corps, the 18th, was relieved by the 7th Division, which formed part of the V. Corps. The Fifth Army had now been reduced to two corps in the line, and shortly afterwards the headquarters of the II. Corps moved out of the Army area en route for the north. Orders were also issued for twelve of its siege and heavy batteries to be transferred to the First and Third Armies.

On the evening of the 20th General Gough held a conference with Lieut.-Generals Birdwood and Fanshawe, at which, significantly, the main topic of discussion was railways and roads. The intervals between railheads and outposts were now becoming long; for example, the railhead of the II. Corps had remained at Albert, 15 miles as the crow flies from St. Leger, now occupied by its advanced guard, and, of course, further by road. In good weather and with good roads this was a distance well within the compass of supply columns and trains, but in the present circumstances it imposed a very heavy strain upon them. General Gough directed that all efforts should be concentrated upon the restoration of the main Ancre valley railway as far as Achiet le Grand, and the extension of the Candas—Acheux line from its present terminus at Colincamps, through Serre and Puisieux, to join the other line at Achiet le Grand.² Only two light railways were to be maintained; that on the front of the I. Anzac Corps, which was to be pushed forward to Bapaume, and a branch from the existing Acheux—Albert line. Similarly, labour and material were to be expended on three roads only: the main Albert—Bapaume road and the second-class Hamel—Achiet le Petit—Achiet le Grand and Serre—Puisieux—Bucquoy—Ablainzeville roads. For all this

¹ It is, however, doubtful whether the headquarters of the Fifth Army was given, at any rate then, details as to what happened at Noreuil. The war diary does not mention the incident.

² This latter line was not proceeded with until 1918.

work labour would have to be provided largely from the fighting troops.

General Gough then stated that it would be impossible to "rush" the enemy's rear guards any further than had been already done. The outpost villages, Beaumetz, Lagnicourt, Noreuil, Longatte, Ecoust and Croisilles, would have to be taken by deliberate operations, though each corps might deal with its part of the line independently as soon as sufficient artillery was up. As regards the Hindenburg Line itself, that could not be attacked until after a thorough artillery preparation.

When General Gough included Beaumetz among the villages which would have to be taken by deliberate methods, he did not realize that it was in the nature of an advanced work to the main rear-guard line. The Australian right column under Br.-General Elliott, though held up in front of it on the 20th, found it empty during the night and occupied it before dawn on the 21st. That day and the next were spent in preparations for the attack on the German line of outposts.

On the 23rd, just before dawn, the enemy attempted to recapture Beaumetz, driving in the posts of the Australian 15th Brigade, and entered the village from the north and south-east. After fierce fighting he was ejected by the garrison, before the Australian reserves had time to intervene, leaving 11 prisoners and 50 dead in the streets. Next day he repeated the attempt, again at dawn, after an hour's bombardment. This time he did not even succeed in entering the village, though a small party occupied an outlying house and refused to surrender till a field gun brought up to within 500 yards of their shelter had gutted it with a single shell.

The V. Corps was less forward with its preparations than the I. Anzac, and, besides, there appeared to be considerably more wire in front of Ecoust and Croisilles than in front of Lagnicourt and Noreuil. As time was beginning to press, General Gough, in accordance with the view expressed at the conference on the 20th, directed that the two corps might conduct their operations independently. Lieut.-General Birdwood then decided to breach the outpost line on the 26th. This time Lagnicourt was the objective, though Noreuil was also to be bombarded. Five siege or heavy batteries were now established north-east of Bapaume, and two field artillery brigades were with the left advanced guard, now consisting of Br.-General

Wisdom's 7th Brigade, which had relieved the 6th immediately after its repulse from Noreuil.

This attack was carried out by the 26th and 27th Battalions, under a barrage which opened on the outskirts of the village at 5.15 A.M.,¹ remained there for twenty minutes to allow the infantry to come up to it, and then moved forward at the rate of 100 yards in four minutes. It was completely successful, though the centre company of the 26th, under Captain P. H. Cherry, which had to move through the village, met with stern resistance, and had hard fighting at close quarters before it burst through to join those which had passed round Lagnicourt and were already established to the north and east.² An early counter-attack on the 27th Battalion from Noreuil was repulsed. A more powerful one from the Hindenburg Line at Pronville came dangerously near to success; for the enemy broke through south of the Lagnicourt—Doignies road and appeared to have Lagnicourt at his mercy. However, the resolution of the defence outlasted his own, and at the crucial moment he drew off. The Australian casualties, including those of the 15th Brigade on the left, were 19 officers and 358 other ranks.

It had at first been intended that the 7th Division should attack Ecoust and Longatte on the same day. This division, however, found difficulty in pushing its posts close enough for an assault and also reported that the wire was insufficiently cut. Eventually there was substituted for this operation an attack on Croisilles by the 91st Brigade on the 28th, time being thus given for further wire-cutting and for bombardment of the village with gas shell. Major-General Barrow asked his left-hand neighbour, Major-General H. D. Fanshawe, commanding the 58th Division in the VII. Corps (Third Army), for assistance. The latter could not give it, as his division was being relieved by the 30th (Major-General J. S. M. Shea). He therefore arranged a conference, attended by a staff officer of the VII. Corps, at which Major-General Shea promised that, if the attack were put back 24 hours, the 30th Division would carry out a simultaneous operation to assist the 7th. The postponement was, however, refused by General Gough.

¹ Summer Time had come into use at midnight on the 24th.

² Captain Cherry, after magnificent work in this attack and in repelling the subsequent counter-attack, was killed on the 27th. He was posthumously awarded the V.C.

Nor had the time allowed for cutting the wire been sufficient. The 22/Manchester penetrated it at one point only, an officer with a dozen men cutting his way through and remaining inside the defence for 36 hours. The right of the 1/South Staffordshire was similarly checked; its left company, which had been ordered to take up a position north-west of the village and to intercept the garrison in the event of its retreat, was counter-attacked, enveloped, and virtually destroyed. The 91st Brigade had had a similar mishap at Bucquoy. For neither failure could it be held to blame, especially in view of the great effort subsequently required to take Croisilles.

The first intention of the corps commander was to renew the attack next morning, but it was eventually decided to include the capture of Croisilles in a much larger operation four days later. The losses in the actual assault were not heavy, but the ill fortune of the left South Staffordshire company brought them to a total of 10 officers and 228 other ranks, including 58 missing.

On the night of the 25th March the elaborate system of booby-traps left behind by the retreating enemy achieved one of its few considerable successes, when the town hall of Bapaume blew up. A mine having been previously removed from the cellars, the building had been regarded as safe. A number of men, mostly Australian troops but including two French Deputies, were killed in their sleep. There had been some thought of transferring the headquarters of the Fifth Army to Bapaume; had it gone there it would doubtless have occupied the town hall, one of the few large buildings left undamaged.

The explosion was caused by a charge fired by a delay-action fuze which avoided the tell-tale ticking of clock-work. A piece of wire attached to a spring was gradually corroded by acid until sufficiently weakened for the spring to break it, and thus release a striker. Occasionally the action of this fuze was slower than was probably intended. One mine near Behagnies, for example, did not explode until the following July. This device was employed also to destroy a number of dug-outs, but in general the methods were simpler. A typical example was a board beside the stairs leading to a deep dug-out, left sticking out slightly at the top. The instinct of a man descending would be to press it back into place, but if he did so a nail behind it was driven against the cap of a cartridge which exploded a charge. Again, a good stove—

an extremely valuable find in the circumstances of the pursuit—would be found with the chimney lying beside it ; but woe betide the man who picked up that chimney and so pulled the wire attached to it. Souvenirs such as cap-badges and bayonets were similarly attached to wires connected with detonators. A cruder device was a charge in a chimney, causing an explosion if a fire were lit.

These gins were responsible for a certain number of casualties and caused delay in making use of shelter, but on the whole they were not strikingly successful. The very fact that dug-outs were left undamaged called for explanation. They were therefore carefully examined by the Royal Engineers, whose courage and ingenuity must have saved many hundreds of lives. The tunnelling companies, whose normal occupation was for the moment gone, had in particular a remarkable flair for detecting ruses of this sort. Some of the traps set in the open were more dangerous. For example, an 8-inch shell was buried in a roadway, with a contact fuze fired by heavy pressure, say, the weight of a lorry. The most ingenious and successful of all was one on the Fourth Army front. Here a bridge was left, as it appeared, hastily and insufficiently demolished. The British engineers built a new one upon it, only to have it blown up, with some loss of life, by a delay-action mine.

While these tricks naturally caused anger, especially among the fighting troops, they were not considered altogether unjustifiable ruses of war. Certain German commanders evidently regarded them as contemptible ; for in the zones of several of the retreating divisions not a trap was found.

THE RETREAT TO THE HINDENBURG LINE 17TH-28TH MARCH

OPPOSITE THE THIRD ARMY

About the hour of dawn on the 17th March it was observed that the enemy's artillery was dropping an occasional shell into his own trenches at Monchy au Bois. The 58th Division (XVIII. Corps) quickly occupied the front line system from thence to north of Blaireville, and patrols pushing forward with great speed found Douchy lez Alette, two and a half miles to the east, also abandoned. The enemy's withdrawal was very swift here, and for good reason.

North of Achiet le Grand there was no defensive system corresponding to the R.3 Line, south of it. The Fifth Army was through the R.2 Line, and the direction of its advance was north-eastward. If the Germans delayed their retirement in the northern half of the Bapaume salient, they would open a flank to the Fifth Army. As we know, General Gough had realized this and had ordered the Lucknow Cavalry Brigade to attempt to cut off the enemy withdrawing in front of the Third Army.¹ The Alberich plan had been too carefully prepared for anything of the sort to happen. In fact, from 9 p.m. on the 16th no locations of hostile batteries were made by sound ranging in the area west of the Hindenburg Line, which indicated that all had been withdrawn behind it. It may be noted that this information was not communicated to the headquarters of the VI. Corps Heavy Artillery till 11 p.m. on the 17th.

During the 18th the 58th Division established itself in strength in the R.1 Line, which here ran through Hendecourt and along the northern edge of Adinfer Wood, while its patrols were able to penetrate to Boiry Ste. Rictrude and Boisleux au Mont, the latter $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the old front line at Ransart. The retreat had also spread to the front of the next corps, the VII., in face of which the enemy abandoned his foremost system of defences for over 2,000 yards on either side of Beaurains.

On the 19th there was a further advance, the 58th Division occupying Boyelles and Boiry Becquerelle, and establishing a detachment in touch with the advanced guard of the 18th Division (Fifth Army) at the mill north of St. Leger. The 30th and 56th Divisions of the VII. Corps reached the Arras—Bapaume road up to a point south of Mercatel. The withdrawal extended to the front of the VI. Corps opposite Arras, though only its right-hand division, the 3rd, was affected. That night the 58th Division passed under the orders of Lieut.-General Sir T. D'O. Snow, commanding the VII. Corps. The headquarters of the XVIII. Corps, left without troops, was then withdrawn.

The Third Army, on that part of its front involved in the German retreat, was now close up to the Hindenburg Line. Only two of the village outposts outside the line, the retention of which was a feature of the retreat, were here still occupied by the enemy. These were the twin

¹ See p. 138.

villages of Hénin sur Cojeul and St. Martin sur Cojeul, which may be counted as one, and the western half of Neuville Vitasse, the eastern half of which was within the Hindenburg Line. General Allenby ordered the VII. Corps to capture Hénin and push forward its line to the outskirts of Neuville Vitasse in conjunction with the V. Corps operations against Croisilles, on the 2nd April. There was therefore until then little change in the situation, though some ground was gained by the left of the VII. Corps on the 20th and 21st. Opposite this corps the German artillery had made only a comparatively slight withdrawal: opposite the VI. Corps it had made hardly any; nor had its system of ammunition supply been seriously deranged. Perhaps in consequence, the German infantry was active, attempting raids against posts of the 58th Division and making two attacks, also unsuccessful, against the 3rd Division, on the left of the new line. Raids carried out by the VI. and VII. Corps resulted in the capture of but few prisoners and in several cases no Germans were seen.

There was little time to spare now. The date for the great attack of the Third and First Armies was the 8th April.¹ Heavy artillery and Army field artillery brigades from the Fourth and Fifth Armies were coming in a stream—between the 20th and the 25th there arrived in the VII. Corps area 16 siege batteries, three heavy batteries, and four Army field artillery brigades. The battery positions prepared were now in part useless because not far enough forward. Immense dumps of ammunition and stores also had to be advanced over roads damaged—after mid-March, indeed, almost ruined—by traffic and alternate frost and thaw, rain and snow. But preparations were in a fair way to completion. The most serious problem was that of the enemy's stubbornness in maintaining strong outposts in front of the Hindenburg Line and preventing the British from approaching it. It was urgently necessary that the outpost villages, Hénin opposite the Third Army and at least the more northerly ones of the line opposite the Fifth, which had been breached only at Lagnicourt, should be carried without hitch or failure anywhere.

¹ The attack was subsequently postponed one day, at the request of General Nivelle, as will be explained.

CHAPTER VI

THE GERMAN WITHDRAWAL (*concluded*)

(Maps 1, 3; Sketches A, 4)

THE OPERATIONS AGAINST THE OUTPOSTS :

FOURTH ARMY

A STRIKING change came over the methods of the Fourth Army at the end of March. It has been pointed out that General Rawlinson had so far had less reason for haste than his colleague in command of the Fifth Army. Now, however, the French G.A.N. on the British right, unable to strike a blow at the retreating enemy, was about to launch an attack on the Hindenburg Line in the neighbourhood of St. Quentin, as a partial substitute for the original operation which had been prevented by the German withdrawal.

By the 1st April General Humbert, commanding the French Third Army, had announced that he hoped to be ready by the 10th. His operation was to take the form of an assault to capture the first line of the new system on a comparatively narrow frontage between the Moulin à tous vents,¹ due south of St. Quentin, and Rocourt, a suburb of the town. If this were successful, it would be followed by a much bigger attack, extending from Alaincourt, on the Oise, to Harly, east of St. Quentin, a frontage of $5\frac{3}{4}$ miles. On the 4th the French captured the last villages in front of the Hindenburg Line on their left flank, and General Humbert ordered a preliminary bombardment to be begun at once.²

In anticipation of this situation Sir Douglas Haig had given General Rawlinson verbal instructions on the 31st March that when the G.A.N. attacked the Hindenburg

¹ Indicated by the conventional sign, but not named, on Map 1.

² F.O.A. v. (i.), Annexes 1120 and 1173.

Line he should co-operate by means of artillery fire. The Commander-in-Chief realized that with the forces at the disposal of the Fourth Army and in the conditions of its advance, an assault on the Hindenburg Line on any considerable scale was impossible, but he desired that General Rawlinson should take such action as circumstances admitted to assist the French in their attack and in the exploitation of any success gained by them. He confirmed these instructions in writing on the 2nd April, sending a copy of the letter to General Nivelle. This was the main cause of the changed methods adopted by General Rawlinson and of the hard fighting for the outpost villages which followed. But on his left also he had been instructed to keep in close touch with the commander of the Fifth Army and to aid the latter's advance. For this purpose he decided to capture Metz en Couture, south of Havrincourt Wood, and the ridge running south of it, as far as the southern outskirts of Gouzeaucourt. When the Fifth Army captured Hermies, he would bring his left further forward to Havrincourt Wood.

By the end of March the British Intelligence Service had obtained, partly from the examination of prisoners but to a greater extent from captured documents, a very fair notion of the mechanism of the retreat. The timetable of the Alberich scheme had been revealed, and the fact that the original withdrawals on the front of the British Fifth Army had formed no part of it. The enemy's present policy was also known. The Germans were clinging to what have been described as the outpost villages because work on the Hindenburg Line was not nearly complete. The delay in their programme was chiefly due to the fact that south of Quéant they had laid out their defences anew.¹ After the capture of the northern outpost villages, on the 2nd April, which will shortly be described, prisoners stated that these were to have been held for some time longer, though exactly how much longer they did not know. At Lempire, taken on the 5th, the victorious British troops were able to refit themselves from a store of new underclothes.

There had likewise, it appeared, been a difference between the methods of the German *First Army*, from south-east of Arras to Péronne, and those of the *Second Army*, between Péronne and the Oise. The *First Army* had employed a number of so-called "Siegfried divisions"

¹ See p. 91.

from reserve, through which those battered and worn out by British pressure had been withdrawn. These "Siegfried divisions" had been brought up to the R.3 Line. They also, as far as their main bodies were concerned, were now behind the Hindenburg Line, but their rear guards were holding the outpost villages. The *Second Army*, which had come in for less fighting, had used its original troops. Another difference was that the *Second Army*, which had the farther to go, had at its disposal portions at least of two cavalry divisions, the *2nd* and *7th*, and several cyclist battalions, whereas the *First* had depended on infantry rear guards, supported only by squadrons of divisional cavalry. When, however, the rear guards of both fell back to the last outpost villages, their dispositions became approximately the same.

It has been recorded that on the 28th March the Fourth Army established itself upon a new line of resistance from Germaine to Bertincourt.¹ That night Neuville Bourjonval, a mile west of the western outskirts of Havrincourt Wood, was taken by the troops of the XV. Corps after some resistance, and the neighbouring village of Ruyaulcourt was captured about the hour of dawn on the 29th. The corps cavalry, the 1/1st R. Wiltshire Yeomanry, attempted to seize Sorel le Grand, but was held up by machine-gun fire. It was a very wet day, and the horses, hock deep in mud, were almost worn out; but in any case it appeared that stronger methods were required at Sorel.²

It was taken on the 30th as part of a well-conducted operation, one which, in the view of Major-General W. C. G. Heneker, commanding the 8th Division, his troops would not have been capable of carrying out but for the experience of the past three weeks. Facing the division lay the villages of Heudicourt, Sorel and Fins, the first two on the southern slope above the valley through which ran the railway from Vélou to St. Quentin, Fins at the bottom of the valley. All were overlooked from the horse-shoe-shaped northern slope, whereon lay the hamlet of Revelon and Dessart Wood, and could be held only if this were captured also. Obviously, if the villages were taken quickly and by surprise, the advance against the northern slope would become an easier operation.

¹ See p. 137.

² The regiment had reported that unless more forage could be provided it was likely to lose a large proportion of its horses as a result of exposure to bad weather, deep going, long hours under the saddle, and inadequate food. In nine days 22 horses had been killed and 35 wounded or evacuated.

Under cover of darkness, therefore, the 23rd Brigade (Br.-General G. W. St. G. Grogan) closely picketed Heudicourt, and the 25th (Br.-General C. Coffin) Sorel and Fins. The two last named were rushed before dawn, but Heudicourt, a bigger village, held out till afternoon, though surrounded on three sides. Br.-General Grogan ordered the attack on Revelon and the copses east of it to be launched whether or not Heudicourt was in British hands. His operation against the right of the horse-shoe, being the more difficult of the two, was not to begin until the 25th Brigade's advance on his left was occupying the enemy's attention.

As regards artillery, four sections of 18-pdrs. had been allotted to each brigade, the rest of the divisional artillery, a field artillery brigade of the 40th Division, and a 4.7-inch battery being under the hand of the C.R.A., Br.-General H. G. Lloyd. The division also had a call upon a battery of 60-pdrs. and one of 6-inch howitzers. The field artillery and machine guns were to use observed fire, the guns attached to the infantry brigades lengthening their range in response to light signals.

After the capture of Sorel and Fins the ground ahead was carefully reconnoitred, and it was determined that the 25th Brigade's attack on Dessart Wood should be made from the south-west, covered by machine guns previously established on the spurs south and west of it, but that the brigade should not advance against the high ground north of Heudicourt until that village had fallen. This programme was carried out without a hitch by the 25th Brigade. Half an hour after it had been begun the 23rd Brigade assaulted and took Heudicourt, and then launched its attack on Revelon and the neighbouring copses. Revelon was quickly taken, but one of the copses gave some trouble. Only 18 prisoners were captured, but a number of Germans were killed. The British casualties were 12 killed and 56 wounded.

The action appeared to reveal a flaw in the German rear-guard tactics. The enemy concentrated on the defence of the villages without regard to the ground which dominated them, thus not only providing the pursuers with well-defined objectives but permitting them to occupy positions from which these could be captured without great difficulty.

On the same afternoon the hamlet of Ste. Emilie was captured after a sharp fight by the 1/4th Gloucestershire

of the 48th Division (Major-General R. Fanshawe) of the III. Corps. During the night the IV. Corps occupied Vermand on the Omignon, and next day the III. took Vendelles, Jeancourt and Hesbecourt without much opposition.

On the 1st April more serious operations for the capture of the main German outposts began on the front of the IV. Corps. Lieut.-General Woollcombe decided to cut out the enemy's strong position in Holnon Wood by passing round it the 32nd Division from the south and the 61st from the north. The plan was the conception of Major-General C. D. Shute, commanding the 32nd, and the more important part of it was carried out brilliantly by his troops. It was an example of true open warfare, the first, perhaps, that British troops on the Western Front had seen since 1914—a fluid programme, artillery moving across country by daylight and being in action from three positions within 24 hours, open flanks, and a speed bewildering by recent standards. The whole enterprise was based on a correct appreciation of the altered situation and the altered methods of the enemy.

At dawn the 17/Highland L.I. and 11/Border Regiment of the 97th Brigade (Br.-General C. A. Blacklock) stormed the village of Savy, and after heavy fighting in the streets killed or captured a large proportion of the garrison. Patrols were sent forward to the Bois de Savy, with the intention that it should be seized if only lightly held; if held in strength, an attack by the 96th Brigade (Br.-General L. F. Ashburner) was to be launched against it as soon as possible. The latter action proved necessary. The ridge running south-east from Savy was then seized, so that six 18-pdr. batteries should be enabled to move forward under its cover. It had been hoped to launch the second attack at 2 P.M., but it was considered wiser to allow another hour for the advance of the artillery and reconnaissance by the infantry.

Unless it were to postpone its attack until the following morning—which would have spoiled the plan for co-operation with the 61st Division—the 96th Brigade could not assemble closer to its objective than the Château de Pommery, south of Etreillers. From this point it had to advance 5,000 yards across open country, dominated on the right by the Epine de Dallon, opposite the French front and still in the hands of the enemy, and with its left exposed to fire from the direction of Holnon Wood. Fortunately,

machine-gun fire from both quarters was at fairly long range; nevertheless, taken in conjunction with that of artillery, it caused serious loss. The 2/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers on the right suffered particularly heavily by fire from the Epine de Dallon, but pressed on without a check. Great difficulty was found in penetrating Savy Wood and the unnamed wood south of it, which had both been barricaded with fallen trees and brushwood, so that the halt on the railway to St. Quentin was not captured until 8.30 P.M.

Meanwhile the 14th Brigade (Br.-General W. W. Seymour) had concentrated at Germaine, Foreste and Lanchy. Major-General Shute debated whether it should be sent forward that evening against the villages of Holnon and Sélency, east of Holnon Wood. Had this been possible, the enemy could hardly have withdrawn his guns behind the wood in time; but there was not enough daylight left for the artillery to change position and register after the capture of Savy Wood, besides which the infantry had a long march in front of it. He therefore issued orders for the brigade to move up by night to a position between Savy and Savy Wood and to launch its attack next morning. During the night also two brigades of field artillery moved up to the southern outskirts of Savy, a battery of 6-inch howitzers to west of Roupy, and batteries of 60-pdrs. to positions near Vaux and Fluquières. Short as were these moves, they represented a great effort on the part of the overworked and underfed horses in soft going, and teams of eight in relays had to be used to move the field artillery.

This attack, the direction of which was almost due north, its left being on the Savy—Holnon road, was launched at 5 A.M. Again it was completely successful. South-east of Francilly Sélency the 2/Manchester on the right captured a battery of six field guns, which had been firing over open sights. During the action the battalion suffered some fifty casualties by fire from a quarry, which it also captured, with six machine guns.¹ The three villages of Francilly Sélency, Sélency and Holnon were all taken within three-quarters of an hour, and touch was established with the 61st Division north of Holnon Wood soon afterwards.

¹ It was here that in March 1918 the 16/Manchester made its heroic and celebrated stand. The quarry formed the quarters of the garrison of the hill below which it lay, known as Manchester Hill, and the work defended by the 16/Manchester was known as Manchester Redoubt. These names thus commemorate two of the regiment's feats of arms.

The big wood, roughly two miles from north to south and a mile from west to east, had thus been surrounded without a frontal attack, but the enemy had been given time to evacuate it and to remove all his artillery except the one battery captured. Of the total of 93 prisoners taken in the three attacks more than half were captured in the first, at Savy. Seventy-two German dead were counted by a staff officer in this village alone. The casualties of the 32nd Division were also heavy, the total being 973.¹

The battery, which lay in advance of the line consolidated by the infantry, could not be drawn out until the night of the 3rd April, and then only after a hard struggle. Major F. W. Lumsden, G.S.O.2 of the division, led an artillery party commanded by Lieutenant C. W. Ward and an infantry escort up to the position in face of heavy musketry fire. Teams under the command of Lieutenant B. C. Trappes-Lomax then drew the guns out one by one. Before the last could be got out a party of the enemy about one hundred strong broke through a gap in the covering force, reached the gun, and blew out its breach. The Germans were then driven off and this gun also was withdrawn by Major Lumsden, who was awarded the Victoria Cross. Prisoners stated that an effort by a "storm troop" to save the guns coincided with the British attempt to withdraw them. But for this the German artillery fire might have been concentrated on the guns and rendered success almost impossible, whereas it actually put a fairly innocuous barrage round them.

Meanwhile the 61st Division, advancing astride the Omignon, captured Maissémy and Bihecourt on either bank on the morning of the 2nd, with 23 prisoners and two machine guns. It then, as stated, pushed out a detachment to join hands with the 32nd.

On the III. Corps front Epehy and Peizière were taken on the 1st by the 7/Worcestershire and 6/Gloucestershire (144th Brigade, Br.-General H. R. Done) and 6/R. Warwickshire (143rd Brigade, Br.-General G. S. Sladen) of the 48th Division. This was a surprise attack without artillery fire and resulted in the capture of 26 prisoners and a field gun. On the 3rd April there was a pause, but the French captured the Epine de Dallon, thus closing up to the Hindenburg Line.

	Killed	Wounded	Missing
Officers . . .	12	38	1
Other Ranks . .	162	731	29

On the 4th April the pressure shifted once more to the XV. Corps. Here the 59th Brigade (Br.-General R. C. Browne-Clayton) of the 20th Division carried out a very fine attack in a thick snowstorm against Metz en Couture, south of Havrincourt Wood, and a trench running westward from the village to the south-western corner of the wood. The advance was due northward from Dessart Wood and was supported by the artillery of the 20th Division, three batteries of the 8th, three 6-inch howitzers, and two 60-pdrs. In this case there was an ingenious combination of the systems of a barrage moving to a fixed programme, which avoids risk of accident, and a barrage controlled by the infantry, which has its own obvious advantages. At zero the 18-pdrs. were to put down their fire on the trenches south and west of Metz. Forty minutes later they were to lift, some batteries to the northern part of the village, some to the trenches north and north-west of it, and some to the southern outskirts of Havrincourt Wood. If white flares were sent up by the infantry in Metz, those batteries which were firing on the village were to lift off it at once; if not, they were to remain on the northern part till zero plus 85 minutes. In either case at this hour they were to lift to the southern edge of the wood.

The assault apparently came as a surprise to the enemy, since hot coffee was found in a number of undemolished houses in Metz. Eighty-eight prisoners and three machine guns were captured, but the British casualties were again heavy: 96 killed, 272 wounded and 30 missing. To cover the right of the attack the 25th Brigade (8th Division) captured Gouzeaucourt Wood, after having been held up by uncut wire on its fringes.

Next day it was the turn of the III. Corps in the centre to strike. The 145th Brigade (Br.-General D. M. Watt) captured the cluster of villages, Ronssoy, Basse Boulogne and Lempire, after being temporarily checked by wire and having some close fighting in the streets. In this case there was no preliminary bombardment and the barrage was not put down until called for by the infantry. The casualties were 34 killed, 107 wounded and six missing; but as 45 prisoners were taken and numbers of the enemy were shot down in flight this was possibly one of the operations in which the attack suffered less heavily than the defence. Six machine guns were also captured. It is of interest to note that Ronssoy was the last village in the Department of the Somme to remain in German hands.

That evening a new line of resistance was taken up, east of Holnon, Ronsoy, Epehy and Metz en Couture. It should have included le Verguier, but an attack by a battalion of the 59th Division (Major-General A. E. Sandbach) on the 4th had failed to capture that village.

The resistance of the German rear guards appeared to be gradually stiffening; at all events they had had time to put out more wire. An attack on Fresnoy le Petit on the IV. Corps front was to have been undertaken at 10 p.m. on the 5th by the 188rd Brigade of the 61st Division (Major-General C. J. Mackenzie). On the report of patrols that the village had been evacuated, the bombardment was cancelled and two companies were sent to occupy it. They found the eastern half of Fresnoy not only held but strongly wired, and were accordingly withdrawn to the western outskirts. Twenty-four hours later another night attack under a barrage was carried out, but the wire was uncut and all that could be done was to dig in in front of it, half-way through the village. Meanwhile the 184th Brigade, north of the Omignon, was likewise stopped by wire on the ridge north-east of Vadencourt and forced to withdraw to its original position. It required a third night operation, on the 7th, to take the whole of Fresnoy and the trenches north and east of it.

On the 9th the 61st Division occupied the ridge between Fresnoy le Petit and le Verguier, and the enemy thereupon evacuated the latter village, which was occupied by troops of the 59th Division. That day a bombardment of the Hindenburg Line was begun on the whole front of the Fourth Army to coincide with the general offensive of the Third and First Armies at Arras and Vimy.

The Fourth Army was now close enough to the Hindenburg Line to shell it along its whole front with the scanty heavy artillery still remaining at its disposal, and on the right even with a proportion of its field artillery at long range, not less than 6,000 yards. There was still, however, a strong outpost position in front of it, and offensive operations were to be continued until the last week of April. These will be briefly described at a later stage after the account of the Battle of Arras, which began on the day already reached by this record.

It will have been noticed from the short accounts of these actions that the British methods were not stereotyped or lacking in imagination. Attacks had been launched at dawn, in the afternoon, and at nine o'clock

at night. They had been made with and without preliminary bombardment; under set barrages, or barrages demanded by the infantry, at Metz a combination of the two methods, and at Épehy without a barrage. There had been good use of ground and cleverly conceived turning movements, as at Holnon Wood. The overnight picketing of Heudicourt, Sorel and Fins as a preliminary to the capture of the high ground beyond them had been a very happy stroke. Yet hardly any of these attacks had been made without fairly heavy losses, and in some cases the losses, in proportion to the numbers engaged, had been higher than in the more fortunate of the trench warfare operations.

Nor would it be correct to say that the machine gun had been almost solely responsible for the casualties incurred, though it had caused the majority of them. The German defence was soldierly and workmanlike, but no more; there was nothing brilliant in its methods, and the machine guns were more often posted in the western outskirts of villages, where they were expected to be, than under some slight cover in the open, where they would have been most difficult to locate. In several cases, especially with dawn or night attacks, the infantry reached its objective without serious loss; but the German artillery commonly redressed the balance later on, and the expenditure required to capture similar objectives varied remarkably little, whatever the methods employed.

The British were, it is true, handicapped by bad communications. If, generally speaking, the quantity of field artillery and its ammunition available were as adequate as could reasonably be expected in open warfare, the blowing of craters in the roads and the destruction of culverts often limited the support given by heavier calibres.

Another handicap was the exposure of the troops to the exceptionally bad weather—such snow as was experienced in early April being rare in Picardy—in completely devastated country, whereas the German rear guards could live in comparative comfort, blowing in the cellars and dug-outs at the last moment. In old wars troops almost always either went into quarters or carried out only siege operations in winter. Trench-warfare operations, though not on a very great scale, had been carried out by the Fourth and Fifth Armies between January and March, but these corresponded more or less to the siege warfare of old days and, despite their horrors and unexampled

difficulties, the troops in the line were not far from shelter when the time came for rest, and those in reserve enjoyed a measure of comfort sufficient to maintain their health. In the pursuit all alike were subjected to exposure and hardship without intermission. Yet here there was at least partial compensation in the raised morale created by escape from water-logged trenches and in the exhilaration of pursuing the enemy across open country. The disease of "trench foot" disappeared; the spirits of the troops rose; and their tactical skill rapidly increased.¹

Nevertheless, it was once more proved that experience under fire, in whatever conditions, is one of the most important features of training. It was not the newly arrived formations, trained mainly for open warfare, but the "Somme divisions" that showed the greatest aptitude and most quickly learnt the new lessons.

Draught animals suffered more than men, owing to the effects of a reduced ration, exposure, and the constant employment of artillery horses for the cartage of stone. An order, due to a threat of mange, that horses should be "clipped out" appears to have contributed greatly to the wastage.² Ten days after the date to which the record has been carried the shortage in the Army, including the 5th Cavalry Division, was over 3,500, almost all heavy or light draught horses and mules. Several heavy batteries were almost immobilized from this cause.

THE OPERATIONS AGAINST THE OUTPOSTS :

FIFTH AND THIRD ARMIES

General Gough had directed that the I. Anzac Corps should capture Doignies, Louverval and Nœreuil, and the V. Corps Longatte, Ecoust St. Mein and Croisilles on the 2nd April. This chain of outpost villages had already, as we know, been breached by the capture of Lagnicourt, south-east of Nœreuil. Possession of Lagnicourt was to prove of great value to the Australians in their operation

¹ Escape from trench warfare sometimes had this effect even in defeat and retreat, as a year later in the great German offensive. For a comment on this, see "1918", Vol. I., p. 533.

² Brigadier F. Fitzgibbon writes: "In my own battery the clipping order was resisted and was subjected to methods of obstruction to such effect that only six horses had been clipped when the battery marched. "Six horses died during the advance—the six clipped ones."

against Noreuil, but it was too far—over two-and-a-half miles—from Louverval to influence action against the two southern villages.

After the capture of Lagnicourt the 2nd Australian Division on the left of the I. Anzac Corps had been relieved by the 4th, the 2nd Australian Divisional Artillery and the XII. Army Field Artillery Brigade, an Australian formation, remaining in support, as the artillery of the 4th Division had not yet been brought up. The 5th Division on the right was left in for the operation, though it had had a long spell in front line. Five siege, including one 8-inch, and three 60-pdr. batteries had been brought up to positions from which they had already been bombarding the Hindenburg Line about Bullecourt at a range of some 7,000 yards. The first ammunition train had reached Achiet le Grand on the 28th March.

The attack on Doignies and Louverval was to be carried out by the 14th Australian Brigade (Br.-General C. J. Hobkirk). These places lay on either side of the Bapaume—Cambrai road, only about a thousand yards apart. Doignies was a medium-sized village; Louverval a château set in a wooded park with a handful of houses, probably those of dependants of the manor. Since the field artillery available consisted of only one brigade with two extra batteries attached, a surprise attack before dawn seemed to offer the best chance of success. This necessitated a plan which would avoid some wire obstacles round the outskirts of the two places. It was therefore decided to encircle them, one battalion passing south of Doignies and one north of Louverval, to join hands beyond. Subsequently, however, it appeared to the Australian patrols that the gap between the defences of Doignies and those of Hermies, a mile and a quarter to the south-east, had been closed. The scheme had therefore to be recast, the right battalion now moving between Doignies and Louverval, which necessitated the preliminary capture of a post at a sugar refinery on the Bapaume—Cambrai road.

Some confusion occurred in the darkness, and this resulted in the attack on Doignies coming in flank, that is, from the north, instead of in rear, and in the escape of the garrison; but the village was quickly taken. At Louverval, too, the attacking troops for the most part made their way painfully through the woodland, where the Germans had cut down a large proportion of the trees, instead of north of it. There was some hot fighting here and the

Australians were shelled by batteries in Demicourt, but again they seized their objectives and held them. A counter-attack coming from Demicourt against Doignies was caught by the heavy and field artillery, answering a wireless call from an aeroplane, and was shattered. Another against Louverval was also broken up. Once again the casualties were heavy, over four hundred, for the most part in the two battalions which had carried out the attack.

The attack on Noreuil, for which more artillery was available than for the southern operation, was to take place under a barrage and according to a definite time-schedule, beginning at 5.15 A.M., whereas on the 5th Division front the time had been left to the local commanders. It was to be carried out by the 18th Australian Brigade (Br.-General T. W. Glasgow). His plan again was to surround the village, making use of Lagnicourt to launch one battalion in a northerly direction, while another attacked from the west. The former, on reaching the eastern outskirts, was to swing right towards its final objective, the Lagnicourt—Bullecourt road, while the latter kept straight on to the same objective, Noreuil being meanwhile “mopped up” by special detachments.

The 50th Battalion had hard fighting to overcome some barricaded posts on the roads leading south out of Noreuil, against which Stokes mortars were used. In one of these actions Private J. C. Jensen, a bomber, displayed extraordinary gallantry and resource which earned him the Victoria Cross. The right company, making its right-hand wheel before the rest and so becoming isolated, then ran into still greater difficulties. It came under heavy fire from machine guns on the Lagnicourt—Bullecourt and Noreuil—Quéant roads, suffered heavy loss, and to crown all, was counter-attacked from the rear by part of the garrison of Noreuil, which, having overcome and captured the inadequate force of “moppers-up”, was escaping from the village driving its prisoners in front of it. The men of the right company were almost all killed or captured, but the dangerous breach was closed by Lewis guns. The 51st Battalion on the left had encountered less difficulty, but finding that fire was coming from Noreuil in its rear and that Longatte on its left flank was not yet taken, had gone to ground in a newly-dug shallow trench 250 yards short of its objective, the Lagnicourt—Bullecourt road. During the night it was found that this

road had been abandoned, and it was at once occupied by the Australians.

The casualties of the brigade were more than six hundred, of whom the Germans claim to have captured 83.¹ One hundred and thirteen Germans and seven machine guns were taken.²

On the front of the V. Corps the 7th Division, now commanded by Major-General T. H. Shoubridge, attacked the linked villages of Ecooust and Longatte and renewed its attack on Croisilles, a mile and a quarter to the north-west. Here there was no shortage of artillery, the field artillery having been reinforced in view of the coming offensive and the heavy artillery strengthened for the same purpose. The 7th Division had at its disposal four field artillery brigades and one of horse artillery. Croisilles had proved so hard a nut to crack that this time it was to be pinched out, by the 7th Division from the south and the 21st (Major-General D. G. M. Campbell) from the north. The 21st, which had recently relieved the 58th Division, was in the VII. Corps, Third Army, and it was somewhat unusual to call for co-operation of this nature at the point of junction between two Armies.

While the 7th Division was capturing its first objective on the left, the railway between Ecooust and Croisilles, the heavy artillery was to keep Croisilles under bombardment. It was also to remain on Ecooust until the last possible moment, namely, twelve minutes after Zero.

The attack of the 20th Brigade (Lieut.-Colonel E. I. de S. Thorpe) against Longatte and Ecooust was in some degree compromised by the enemy's seizure on the 1st April of a post on the Beugnâtre—Ecooust road, as a consequence of which dispositions had to be altered. Both villages were nevertheless taken, though at Ecooust there was found to be only a single gap in the wire, where it crossed the road just mentioned. The determination with which a company of the 8/Devonshire forced its way through at this point greatly contributed to the capture not only of this village but also to that of Longatte. Fifty-two prisoners were taken, and no less than 14 machine guns, which had proved less effective in the street fighting than the Lewis guns of the attackers. The 20th Brigade suffered just over 300 casualties.

The 91st Brigade (Br.-General H. R. Cumming) attacked

¹ See Note at end of Chapter.

² The battalion of the *119th Reserve Regiment*, which bore the brunt of the fighting at Noreuil, had 257 casualties.

with three battalions in line, the 22/Manchester being held in reserve while the first objective, approximately the line of the railway between Ecoust and Croisilles, was captured and then being launched against Croisilles. In the centre and on the left a section of the British barrage, apparently fired by an attached battery which had not had time to register, fell behind the tape laid for the forming-up, causing some loss and confusion. Nevertheless, almost all of the first objective was reached. Before the 22/Manchester attacked Croisilles the divisional commander intervened and directed that the heavy artillery should place a barrage on the south edge of the village, which would move through it to the northern outskirts at the rate of 100 yards in five minutes, followed by a shrapnel barrage, and then lift to a protective line beyond. At 11.30 A.M. two companies entered on either side of the Sensée and cleared the place after hard fighting. The brigade suffered 244 casualties in this successful attack. In the whole operation against the line Longatte—Croisilles the division captured 152 prisoners and 20 machine guns, and it was reported that the Germans had left 200 dead on the field.

The operations against Croisilles and Hénin were assisted and linked by the 21st Division, represented by the 62nd Brigade (Br.-General C. G. Rawling). It had to attack on the unusually wide frontage of 3,500 yards, but had no fortified village in its path, its objective being the Croisilles—St. Martin sur Cojeul road. This operation, too, was marked by a liberal use of heavy artillery in support of the infantry. The fire of heavy and siege batteries was maintained until the last possible moment on the sunken roads—always favourite rear-guard positions with the enemy, who dug shelters in the banks—north-west of Croisilles, then lifting to the Hindenburg Line. The infantry advanced behind an 18-pdr. barrage moving at the rate of 100 yards in two minutes, and reached the road without great difficulty. At 6.30 A.M. the 13/Northumberland Fusiliers was counter-attacked from Croisilles, which, as we have seen, was not entered till over five hours later by the 7th Division. The enemy was driven back after hand-to-hand fighting, but the brigade found it impossible to close the eastern exits of the village, as it had been instructed to do, and a large proportion of the garrison escaped the 7th Division. Twenty-nine prisoners and four machine guns were captured, the losses being 162.

The capture of Hénin sur Cojeul by the 30th Division

(Major-General J. S. M. Shea) was an operation small in scope though difficult enough of execution, the objective being the village alone, not including the adjoining St. Martin. The assault was entrusted by Br.-General G. D. Goodman, commanding the 21st Brigade, to Lieut.-Colonel C. V. Edwards, 2/Green Howards, who had at his disposal, in addition to his own battalion, two companies of the 19/Manchester, two machine guns, two Stokes mortars, and a detachment of 30 men of the brigade pioneers.¹ The attack was launched under a barrage moving at the rate of 100 yards in five minutes. On either flank of the village parties were to work their way round the outskirts and establish strong points at all the exits, while two companies entered the place from the south-west, followed by the two Manchester companies as "moppers up".

The affair developed into the true village fighting of the text-books. All the morning the combat ebbed and flowed, until at last the village was cleared except the principal building, the *mairie*, where a party of Germans held out obstinately. At this juncture the British post established on the west side brought in a Stokes mortar and bombarded the house.² About 3 P.M., after a nine hours' struggle, the whole of Hénin was captured. Thirty-nine prisoners were captured and upwards of 90 Germans killed. The British losses were 64 killed, 103 wounded, and eight missing.

All the villages which it was urgently necessary to capture in view of the forthcoming offensive were now in British hands. On the right of the Fifth Army, however, Hermies, Demicourt, and Boursies were still held by the enemy. The recent progress of the Fourth Army at Havrincourt Wood had now been sufficient for Lieut.-General Birdwood, commanding the I. Anzac Corps, to undertake their capture. The 1st Australian Division, which had relieved the 5th, was ordered to do so. Major-General H. B. Walker decided first of all to capture Boursies, a small village on the Bapaume—Cambrai road. He would begin the action by launching from Louverval a night attack on the high ground

¹ In several divisions at this period each brigade had formed a pioneer section drawn from the infantry battalions and occasionally also from the pioneer battalion for work on headquarters, dug-outs, maintenance of trenches, and other tasks for which the field companies and the pioneer battalion were not always available.

² At this post, before it was fully established, the man carrying the gun-tripod was killed and the tripod was lost. The No. 2 of the Detachment, Private Fitton, then used his right shoulder as a rest for the gun, which was fired from his shoulder until the tripod was eventually recovered.

north of the Bapaume—Cambrai road overlooking Boursies. On the following night he would capture Boursies from the north, and make a sudden stroke at Hermies with two columns, one moving eastward along the Canal du Nord, and the other south-eastward from Doignies. Hermies amounted in size to a small town rather than a village, was well protected by barbed wire, and was certain to have a considerably larger garrison than Boursies. It seemed, therefore, that the easiest method of taking it was to distract the enemy's attention by the British progress along the main road, and then surround it by surprise. The plan had the additional advantage that the column from Doignies would move down inside the Hermies defences; for the wire screen covering the latter village ran about half-way to Doignies along the road connecting them. A detachment was to stand by to seize Demicourt, which it seemed almost certain would be evacuated by the enemy if he lost the other two villages.

During the early hours of the 8th, a fine day after several that had been wet and snowy, the preliminary stroke was delivered. Four companies of the 3rd Brigade seized the high ground north of Boursies. In the course of that day these troops were heavily engaged, suffered serious losses, actually lost some of the ground they had gained, and were in no position, even when reinforced, to capture Boursies. None the less, the attack on Hermies was carried out exactly according to plan next morning by the 1st Brigade (Br.-General W. B. Lesslie). In fact, this was probably the solitary attack on the outpost villages where, so far as could be discovered, virtually every man of the garrison was captured or killed, because not a bolt-hole was left unstopped. There was fierce close fighting on the west side of the village, but by 6 A.M. Hermies was in the hands of the Australians, with over 200 prisoners. A premature report that the Germans had abandoned Demicourt led to heavy loss from machine-gun fire, but by noon both this village and Boursies had been occupied. The Victoria Cross was awarded to Private T. J. B. Kenny of the 2nd Battalion for conspicuous bravery in these operations. The Australian casualties were 649 all ranks. A German report sent in before the conclusion of the action gave the enemy's losses in round numbers as 50 killed, 100 wounded, and 240 missing.¹

On the whole of the Fifth Army front, except for little

¹ Australian O.A. iv., p. 249.

posts in holes in the open, mainly for the purpose of watching the British, the enemy was now behind the wire of the Hindenburg Line. On that of the Fourth Army, as has been pointed out, not all the outpost villages had yet been taken, but, broadly speaking, the pursuit had come to an end.

There is little to add to the comments made from time to time in the course of this record. We have considered the handicaps under which the British laboured and have observed the attitude of the higher command. That command had decided that the possibilities of inflicting a heavy blow on the retreating enemy were not sufficiently strong to justify the risks of pressing forward in haste upon his heels. On the front of the Fifth Army it had been proved that these risks were real; indeed it seems probable that by a careful system of ambushes the enemy might have inflicted considerably greater losses than he actually did. Until the last operations against the outpost villages there had been no large-scale operation in the course of the pursuit. In fact, with respect to the Fourth Army, that term is a misnomer.

As a fact, a military pursuit in practice generally involves a series of attacks upon stationary troops. It is only rarely, and usually then after a rout, that the pursued is caught—except by artillery fire—in column of march. Whether he withdraws deliberately or precipitately, he must halt frequently at least to feed and to sleep. It is then that the pursuer comes into contact with his covering forces and, if he can overrun them, compels his main body to fight. If the pursuer either cannot—for reasons such as bad communications—or does not desire to—because the game does not seem worth the candle—thrust aside these covering forces and attack the main body, there is no real pursuit. In this case the main body of the enemy withdrew rapidly to his previously prepared defences in two or three marching days. After the 18th March, therefore, there was never anything in front of the British Fourth and Fifth Armies but strong rear guards. Even the medium-calibre artillery had in almost every case reached the cover of the Hindenburg Line.

It seems that the best chance of catching the enemy before he had begun to move back lay in the attack advocated by General Franchet d'Espérey.¹ It is not, of course, by any means certain that the French G.A.N. could

¹ See p. 125.

have broken the defences on which the Germans had expended so much time and labour, had it been allowed to carry out an assault on the 11th or 12th March. At least, however, it would have had nothing to improvise, as it was fully prepared and ready to take the offensive at short notice. Considering the problem after the event, it certainly appears that it would have been worth while to allow General Franchet d'Espérey to put his project into effect.

NOTE

THE DEFENCE OF NOREUIL AND ECOUST

The German *26th Reserve Division* was holding the Hindenburg Line behind Noreuil and Ecoust, with a battalion in each of these villages. It is stated that at one time the battalion at Noreuil had 300 Australian prisoners in its hands, and that all except three officers and 80 other ranks were killed by the fire of their own side's machine guns. This is undoubtedly an absurd exaggeration. It has been established that a few men were in fact killed by Australian machine guns, but it appears that this fact has been used in the German history to explain the discrepancy between the number of prisoners reported taken and the number there were to show. Probably, as often happened on both sides, two or three companies each reported the capture of the same prisoners.

The two German battalions at Noreuil and Ecoust lost 29 killed, 146 wounded, and 245 missing, a total of 420.¹

¹ "Württemberg's Heer im Weltkrieg", Heft 6, II. Teil, p. 16.

CHAPTER VII

THE BATTLES OF ARRAS 1917 :

THE THIRD ARMY'S PLANS AND PREPARATIONS

(Map 3 ; Sketches A, 5, 6, 7)

THE SCHEME AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

THE seed of the Arras offensive had been germinating for Map 3.
six months, since Colonel Renouard of the French Opera- Sketch A
tions Bureau had outlined to Br.-General J. H. Davidson, in October 1916, General Joffre's proposals for the following year.¹ They were, in brief, that the frontage of the old Somme battlefield should be broadened, the French attacking between the Oise and the Somme and the British between Bapaume and Vimy, leaving in the centre a gap of about eight miles which would be held defensively. Sir Douglas Haig agreed to this bare outline. He could not at that moment define his objectives on the right, because they would depend on what progress was made during the winter ; on the left he intended to capture Vimy Ridge.

The rôle of the Third Army, which then had its right flank between Hébuterne and Gommecourt, was to be considerably modified by subsequent events. The first of these was the remodelling of the whole plan for the Western Front by General Nivelle. All operations north of the Oise were now, as we have seen, to be subsidiary to the great French offensive on the Aisne, and their first object was to employ or even attract the enemy's reserves. They were to consist of a French advance north of the Oise by the G.A.N. in the general direction of St. Quentin, and British operations from the Ancre valley and Arras, with the preliminary object of reducing the Bapaume salient.

The next development was the German retreat to the

¹ See p. 18.

Hindenburg Line. This affected the Third Army directly on its right flank only, but indirectly to a very important degree. The Bapaume salient was gone; the Germans were back in their previously-prepared position; and the support to be expected from the Fifth Army, with miles of ruined communications behind it, was seriously restricted. Nor was this all. The French offensive north of the Oise had also perforce dropped out of the general scheme, and the substitute, an assault on the Hindenburg Line south of St. Quentin, was quite a minor operation and not a very promising one. In fact, from the Third Army's right to the French offensive front on the Aisne, sixty miles as the crow flies, the Allies could not hope to exert in the course of the spring offensive more than a limited pressure or to pin down the enemy's reserves at any point. A great deal more, therefore, obviously hung upon the attack of the Third Army than when it was first discussed in 1916.

These modifications in its rôle did not, however, affect to the same extent the chief preparatory measure: the improvement of communications with a view to the swift concentration at a later date of the resources in men and material required for a great offensive. The most important of these was the doubling of the railway lines from St. Pol and Doullens, of which mention has already been made.¹ Work on roads could be put in hand also, but here General Allenby was for some time to come handicapped by shortage of stone and of labour.

The changes in the general British plan consequent, first, upon Sir Douglas Haig's acceptance of General Nivelle's project, secondly, upon his promise to relieve the French down to the Amiens—Roye road, and, thirdly, upon the German retirement, have already been recorded but may be briefly summarized once more.

The first was fairly important. The Fourth Army, originally given the objectives of Rocquigny, Bapaume, and Loupart Wood, would now have to carry out a relief of the French down to the Amiens—St. Quentin road, which was as far as Sir Douglas Haig had agreed to go when he issued his general instructions of the 2nd January. This Army would therefore be able to contribute little to an offensive beyond keeping touch with the right of the Fifth Army. The Third Army, however, was now allotted 18 divisions instead of the ten of the original estimate, and the frontage of its attack was to be shifted slightly north-

¹ See p. 52.

ward.¹ According to previous arrangements it was to have attacked between Ficheux and the Scarpe; now the base of its advance was placed astride the river, from Beaurains to Roclincourt, whilst the First Army covered its left by the capture of Vimy Ridge.

The second change was a minor one, due to the relief of the French down to the Amiens—Roye road. This further reduced the power of the Fourth Army to exercise serious pressure; but the Fifth Army could still help the Third by means of its Ancre valley attack. In view of the arrival of fresh British divisions, two more were to be added to the Fifth Army. The infantry resources of the Third were to remain as before, but its field artillery was to be increased.²

The third change was the most important of all. In the Commander-in-Chief's directive of the 26th March the Fourth Army was merely instructed to continue, in a comparatively leisurely manner, the operation of pressing back the outposts maintained by the enemy outside the Hindenburg Line. The Fifth Army was instructed to close up to that line in time to deliver a local attack about Quéant in order to support the Third, and also to afford such assistance to the latter's right as might be possible "in view of the difficulties of bringing forward heavy and "siege batteries". In the directive issued ten days earlier, on the 16th, the rôles of both the Third and the First Armies had been extended, partly in accordance with the desire of General Nivelle that a strong thrust should be made in the direction of Cambrai, and partly because the German retreat had rendered it possible and desirable to transfer more troops to the active front. The Third Army was to capture "the German defensive line which "runs from Arras towards St. Quentin by turning it and "attacking it in flank and rear, continuing to operate in "the direction of Cambrai". The First Army still had the duty of capturing Vimy Ridge, thus covering the left of the Third and gaining observation over the Douai plain. But another corps of three divisions was to be allotted to it, for the exploitation of its success in the direction of Douai or, in case of need, for the reinforcement either of the Third Army (offensively) or of the Second (defensively).

¹ See p. 58; and Appendix 6.

² See Appendix 9. The increase was to amount to a maximum of 33 per cent. and a minimum of 2 per cent. in 18-pdrs., a maximum of 22 per cent. and a minimum of 11 per cent. in 4.5-inch howitzers.

There would obviously have to be a certain further modification in the plan of the Third Army because the enemy had now withdrawn opposite its right wing. This, however, was a matter to be left to the initiative of the Army commander, though the Commander-in-Chief would closely scrutinize his arrangements here, as indeed everywhere.¹

The opposing Armies faced one another near the eastern edge of the Artois plateau, which, averaging about 350 feet in height, slopes away, in a general trend slightly north of east, to a big plain only 60 to 120 feet above sea-level. From its source at Tinques, just below the watershed, the Scarpe runs due eastward at first, then northward. Typical of the rivers of Picardy and Artois, it moves slowly in a wide and deep bed, by comparison with which its canalized main channel is only a ditch. Secondary channels, marshes, and in places sheets of water attaining to the dignity of small lakes, are spread over the rest of the generally wooded bed. Two brooks, the Sensée and the Cojeul, descend from the plateau farther south and, uniting at Eterpigny, form with their combined flow a similar deep-cut and marshy bed.

Between these streams long tongues of high ground project towards the plain. The descent is generally continuous, but there are knolls on these spurs where the ground rises again. The most important of these hills or ridges is that between the Cojeul and the Scarpe, on which is perched the village of Monchy le Preux. From the eastern outskirts of Arras, from the Bapaume road through Beaurains and Mercatel, and even from the spurs running eastward from these places, it completely blocks the eastern horizon. When Monchy is reached the view over the Douai plain is endless.

North of the Scarpe is a much more striking feature. The Vimy Ridge, some four miles long and running from north-west to south-east, rises slowly from the west and then drops very abruptly—at one point over 200 feet in 750 yards—to the Douai plain.² In this landscape it has an incongruous air, but those who know the downs about Mere in Wiltshire will at once recognize its formation,

¹ See Appendices 22 and 26.

² It is customary to confine the term "Vimy Ridge" to the highest part, where it is scarped on its eastern face. According to this usage the operations of the Canadian Corps are officially described as the "Battle of Vimy Ridge" and those of the XVII. Corps, south of the line Ecurie—Willerval, as the "First Battle of the Scarpe". Actually, the ridge extends to the Scarpe, and the objective of the XVII. Corps might also be described as Vimy Ridge.

which is there repeated in much bolder ridges, scarped on both flanks. Those who have ridden over the down country of the South and West Wilts Hunt will realize also how soft on the very crests the chalk soil becomes in wet weather. The morasses formed where the ground has been poached by cattle will afford some slight notion of the effects of stationary warfare on such a surface. The country is open. There are few woodlands and no big ones ; hardly a hedge and not many fences.

Apart from the trough of the Scarpe, the Vimy Ridge, and the Monchy spur, the chief feature of the Arras battlefield is Arras itself. The centre of the celebrated old fortress town was only some two thousand yards from the front trenches, which ran through its suburb of Blangy. Its situation determines the course of the roads, which radiate from it towards Béthune, St. Pol, Doullens, Amiens, Bapaume and Péronne, Cambrai, Douai, and Lille by way of Lens.

Practically all the material of the Third Army, coming whether by road or rail, would have to pass through the frequently bombarded streets, and the attack would in effect have to debouch from the town. Obviously there was risk here, not only of heavy casualties but of the blocking of avenues of supply by the destruction of houses. On the other hand, Arras provided an efficient screen, plenty of somewhat dangerous accommodation, and, as we shall presently see, a considerable amount of accommodation underground that was remarkably safe.

The enemy's defensive system south of the Neuville St. Vaast—Bailleul road ¹ was strong and deep. There was the usual first system, maze-like in character but resolving itself into three or four lines of trenches from 75 to 150 yards apart, linked by communication trenches at least every hundred yards. Some hundreds of yards behind that was a support line, which was joined by the Hindenburg Line, curving up from the south-east, on a knoll called Telegraph Hill, half-way between Neuville Vitasse and Tilloy lez Mofflaines. There was a very strong, heavily-wired reserve line, double over the greater part of its length and with a veritable fortress barring the Arras—Cambrai road at Feuchy Chapel. South of the Scarpe this was known as the Wancourt—Feuchy line and was about three miles from the front. North of the river it curved

¹ The defensive system north of this road is described in detail in Chapter XI.

back, and at Oppy, opposite the left of the Third Army, was five miles distant. Here, however, there was an intermediate position, the "Point du Jour" line, from the river at Athies to Farbus, and thence along the steep eastern slope of Vimy Ridge. Finally, some four miles in rear of the reserve line ran the new Drocourt—Quéant Switch, not begun when the project of an offensive in this region was first mooted, identified only gradually in February and March, and not completely plotted on British maps until the Battle of Arras had commenced. As a result of the German retirement in March and of the minor British operation on the 2nd April, the Hindenburg Line from Telegraph Hill on the front of the Third Army, and also on the left of the Fifth, became the enemy's foremost line of defence.

Sir Douglas Haig's plans were, of course, generally known to the Government, which had supported him when General Nivelle tried to eliminate from them the capture of Vimy Ridge. On the 14th March, however, the day after he had signed his agreement with General Nivelle in London,¹ he had a last interview with the War Cabinet, when he not only explained his plans for the Arras offensive but also outlined his views on the situation on the Western Front and the place in them of the often-discussed Flanders offensive. He would :—

Continue his preparations for the offensive of the Third and First Armies, keeping a small reserve—drawn from the Fifth Army—either to support the Second or exploit the successes of the Third and First ;

if successful at Arras, exploit the victory to the fullest possible extent with reserve infantry divisions and with his cavalry ;

if he fell short of success sufficient to provide opportunity for such exploitation, prepare to launch an offensive in the region of Ypres with the object of clearing the Belgian coast ; he might begin by capturing the Messines ridge in May.

Before crossing to England he had gone through their schemes, point by point, with the commanders of corps, of divisions, and as a rule of brigades, in the Third and First Armies, amending in each scheme what he considered to be its weak points.

The plan of General Sir Edmund Allenby, commanding the Third Army, had meanwhile been slowly evolved, having

¹ See p. 58.

been modified not only by the changes in the situation mentioned above but also by the criticism of the Commander-in-Chief. One of the most important alterations which he brought about concerned the action of the artillery. In an appreciation forwarded to G.H.Q. on the 7th February General Allenby, anxious to gain the advantage of surprise, suggested that the preparation for the assault should take the form of an intense bombardment lasting only 48 hours, or half the time considered necessary at the Somme in 1916. He intended that one-third of the guns and howitzers should be rested in turn, and that every officer and man of the artillery personnel should have twelve hours' rest out of the twenty-four; the destruction of wire and trenches in the first-line system was to be carried out mainly by trench mortars. He hoped to reach the "Black Line"—the first-line position—in one hour; the "Blue Line"—the support position—in two hours forty minutes; and, after a halt there of four hours, the "Brown Line"—the Wancourt—Feuchy line south of the Scarpe, and the intermediate Point du Jour line north of the river—in eight hours forty minutes. This would mean that his artillery, or such proportion of it as was within range, would be able to bombard this objective for six hours. He also hoped that the dominating village of Monchy le Preux would be in his hands by nightfall. His appreciation need not otherwise be considered in detail, because the situation on which it was founded was so greatly altered by the German retirement. Its chief interest lies in its suggestion of a deep and swift advance after what may be considered, by the standard of the period, a brief hurricane bombardment. Nothing of the sort had been projected by the British Armies since warfare on the Western Front had assumed its present complexion, the bold and original scheme at Neuve Chapelle in 1915 having been carried out against weak defences.¹

The Commander-in-Chief replied on the 12th February that he disliked the limitation of the preliminary bombardment to 48 hours. He considered that the wear of the guns and the strain upon the personnel would be much greater than if the expenditure of the same amount of ammunition were spread over a longer period; that it was doubtful

¹ This appreciation, and an amended version dated 14th March, when everything pointed to a retreat by the enemy to the Hindenburg Line, but before that retreat had extended to the Third Army front, are given in Appendices 14 and 21.

whether the wire could be properly cut in the time ; and that it was also questionable whether the enemy's morale would be tried as severely by a short hurricane bombardment as by a deliberate and prolonged one, which could be combined with ruses to induce him to man his parapets prematurely.

"As a result of past experience", the Chief of the General Staff wrote to General Allenby, "it may be said definitely that, in view of the great and prolonged preparations required, the enemy cannot be surprised as to the general front of an attack on a large scale, but only to some extent as to its exact limits and as to the moment of assault."

If Sir Douglas Haig was to prove before 1917 was out and more than once in 1918 that he could effect what he now considered impossible, it was to be due partly to counter-battery methods which had not yet been perfected and partly to a great increase in the number of tanks, with a proportionate increase in their moral effect.

General Allenby replied that he had carried out tests with a 6-inch howitzer and an 18-pdr. gun firing the number of rounds in the time contemplated, that no abnormal wear or heating of the tubes had been experienced, and that the personnel was fresh at the end of the period. He estimated that 40 per cent. of the wire would be cut, and considered that that would suffice. As to morale, he made the interesting suggestion that it was at its lowest after 48 hours' continuous bombardment, and that a state of comparative callousness then ensued. There were, however, other arguments against his plan, and these had been put before Sir Douglas Haig by the artillery adviser at G.H.Q., Major-General J. F. N. Birch. In the first place, the great volume of fire which it necessitated in order to destroy the extensive wire defences would make it extremely difficult to observe the effects, either from the ground or from the air ; in the second, a considerable proportion of the heavy artillery was by no means highly trained, having recently arrived in the country and in some instances having as yet taken part in no large-scale active operations, while the field artillery had as yet no instantaneous fuze. In February the M.G.R.A. Third Army, Major-General A. E. A. Holland, was promoted to the command of the I. Corps, and his successor, Major-General R. St. C. Lecky, professed agreement with Major-General Birch's point of view. The artillery plan was then recast. Instead of

intense fire, with batteries shooting largely by the map and engaging targets at three elevations and on three "trainings", the preparation was extended to four days and carried out according to another method, described later on in this chapter. Yet the pace of the advance was passed by the Commander-in-Chief, though apparently with some doubt.¹

As it finally emerged after the German retirement, the plan was as follows:—The Third Army, consisting from right to left of the VII., VI. and XVII. Corps, was to break through the enemy's defences between Croisilles and the Commandant's House, a building south-west of Farbus Wood and marking the boundary with the First Army. It was then to capture the Hindenburg Line by attacking it "in flank and rear", and to advance on Cambrai. Simultaneously with the attack of the Third Army, the First was to capture Vimy Ridge and secure a front from the Commandant's House to Givenchy en Gohelle, and on a date subsequent to this combined attack the Fifth Army was to make another upon the Hindenburg Line at Bullecourt.

The day of the attack, Z day, was to be preceded by four days of bombardment of the enemy's defences, known as V, W, X and Y days. It was not, however, intended to confine the wire-cutting altogether to this period; in fact, it was hoped to carry out about half this work comparatively unobtrusively during the preceding week.

In the first stage, the capture of the first-line system, the VII. Corps on the right would now have to stand fast, because it was already on the Black Line on its front. The VI. and XVII. Corps, each attacking with three divisions in line, were to take this objective in 36 minutes and halt there until Zero+2 hours, that is, one hour and 24 minutes. The Blue Line, or second-line system, was to be reached by all three corps between Zero+2 hours 44 minutes and Zero+3 hours. The advance was to be resumed at Zero+6 hours 40 minutes, and to reach the Wancourt—Feuchy and Point du Jour defences, or Brown Line, at Zero+8 hours. It had always been intended to make an attempt to capture Monchy le Preux before nightfall on the first

¹ It would appear that opinion was fairly equally divided regarding this controversy. It may be added that Major-General H. C. C. Uniacke, M.G.R.A. Fifth Army, spent a short time at Third Army headquarters between the departure of Major-General Holland and the arrival of Major-General Lecky, and that he was apparently against the short artillery preparation. The matter is further discussed in the final chapter.

day, but as the plan developed that village became the centre of the fourth objective—the "Green Line". This objective included Guémappe, south of Monchy, and Fampoux, north of the Scarpe. At Monchy it represented an advance of 3,500 yards from the Brown Line and $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles in all; at Fampoux its attainment would mark the breach of the refused reserve line on a front of 2,000 yards, but nowhere else between the third and fourth objectives would any but isolated defences be encountered. The fourth objective did not extend to the left flank of the Third Army and had no counterpart on the front of the First.¹

An important and novel feature of the plan was that the VI. and XVII. Corps, after capturing the Brown Line, in each case on a frontage of three divisions, were each to pass a fourth division through to capture the Green. The offensive on the Somme had been characterized by narrow frontages and—after the first day, when only a limited measure of success was attained—shallow objectives. Within the division, that is by brigades or battalions, the passage of one formation or unit through another to attack a subsequent objective was frequently practised. If a whole division had shot its bolt but could not yet be conveniently relieved, a brigade from another was sometimes placed at the disposal of its commander. But "leap-frogging", as it was called, had not yet extended to divisions. Now, this was to be the method by which the fourth objective was to be captured on the fronts of the VI. and XVII. Corps, south and north of the Scarpe respectively. It would have been the method of the VII. Corps on the right also, but for the German retirement. Not only was this corps already on the Black Line; its right was actually on the Blue Line, and the Brown Line ended at St. Martin sur Cojeul. Its right-hand division had only to swing up its left to capture its portion of the Green Line. The VII. Corps was therefore operating with all its four divisions in line, on a frontage of nearly six miles, which was greater than that of the other two combined.

The Cavalry Corps was to be used to exploit success. The headquarters with the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Divisions were placed at the disposal of the Third Army commander, who attached to the corps the 17th Division. The 4th Cavalry Division was to be employed by General Gough

¹ Third Army Order No. 173 is given in Appendix 30.

to take advantage of any breach made in the Hindenburg Line by the Fifth Army's projected operation at Bullecourt.¹ The 1st Cavalry Division was to be held in G.H.Q. reserve, in the Third Army area, to reinforce either the Cavalry Corps or the First Army north of the Scarpe. If the situation appeared sufficiently favourable after the capture of the Brown Line, the Cavalry Corps as constituted was to be prepared to pass through the Green Line very shortly after it was reached by the infantry, its first objective being the left bank of the Sensée from Chérisy to Vis en Artois and thence to Boiry Notre Dame.²

Three divisions from the Fourth and Fifth Armies were to form the Army reserve under the orders of Lieut.-General Maxse, commanding the XVIII. Corps, the headquarters of which was already in the Third Army area. That is to say, this Army had under its orders five corps headquarters, including that of the Cavalry Corps. Each of the infantry corps in line had four divisions, the reserve corps three, and the Cavalry Corps one, a total of 16 divisions. The other two divisions of the original allotment of 18 were disposed of as follows: the 58th was moved back to the Frohen area, some 25 miles west of Arras, and placed under the orders of Lieut.-General H. E. Watts, commanding the XIX. Corps, in G.H.Q. reserve, and the 11th remained for the time being in the Fifth Army area about Marieux, also in G.H.Q. reserve, and about two days' march from the battlefield.

The news from the Fifth Army on the 18th March, which suggested the possibility that the enemy intended to hold the Hindenburg Line only temporarily, led to the issue of orders for the Third Army to be prepared to launch a limited attack at 24 hours' notice.³ Later information made it clear, however, that anxiety on this score was needless.

On the 5th April, the day after the beginning of the preliminary bombardment, Sir Douglas Haig saw General Nivelle at Montdidier and was informed that General

¹ See Appendix 39. At an Army Commanders' Conference on 24th March General Gough stated that, as his task was only to capture a section of the Hindenburg Line and he was not required to advance northward, he did not consider he needed the cavalry division allotted to him. Sir Douglas Haig replied that it might well be easier to put this division through on his front than on that of the Third Army, where the roads would be more congested. If it got through it would rejoin the main body of the Cavalry Corps.

² See Appendices 31, 33 and 36.

³ See p. 142. The orders issued are given in Appendices 23 and 24.

Micheler, on the Aisne front, had asked for a postponement of 48 hours. The British Commander-in-Chief did not altogether care to delay his attack, being still somewhat doubtful whether the enemy would not carry out a further withdrawal to avoid the blow. On the other hand, he knew that an extra day's bombardment would not be unwelcome to the Third Army, because observation had been hindered by falls of snow. He therefore agreed to put back his assault for 24 hours, that is, from Easter Sunday, the 8th April, to Easter Monday, the 9th.

ARTILLERY, MACHINE GUNS, TANKS, AND AIRCRAFT

The artillery at the disposal of the Third Army was finally brought up to 858 18-pdrs., 276 4·5-inch howitzers, 144 60-pdrs., 220 6-inch howitzers, 24 6-inch guns, 84 8-inch howitzers, 92 9·2-inch howitzers, 2 9·2-inch guns, 13 12-inch howitzers, 2 12-inch guns, and 5 15-inch howitzers. This included the artillery of the infantry division at the disposal of the Cavalry Corps, but not the horse artillery of the cavalry divisions, and represented about one piece to 12 yards of front.¹

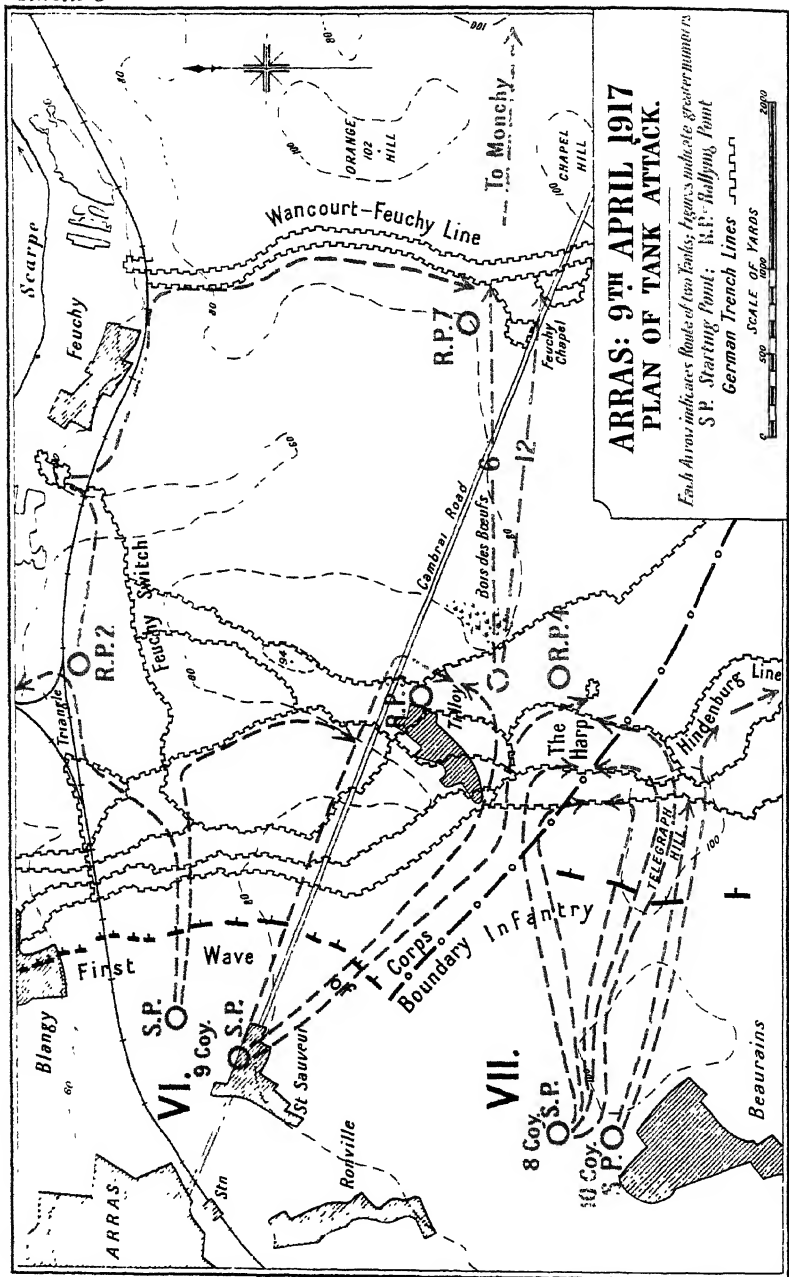
A feature of the bombardment was that destructive fire from all calibres except the largest should be more or less evenly maintained throughout the hours of daylight, but with short pauses to admit of aerial photography. By night heavy but irregular fire, assisted by that of machine guns, was to be carried out in order to prevent the repair of trenches and wire and to interfere with the movements of reliefs, transport, and carrying-parties. The selection of targets was largely left to corps commanders, but the general principles, the employment of the various calibres, the rates of fire, and the expenditure of ammunition were the subject of a long series of instructions drawn up by Major-General Lecky and issued by the General Staff.

¹ It is impossible to give the German artillery facing the Third Army, but that on the whole battle front was as follows :—

419 77-mm. and 9-cm. guns, 240 105-mm. howitzers, 118 10-cm. to 13-cm. guns, 148 15-cm. to 19·9 cm. howitzers, 15 15-cm. guns, and 74 20-cm. howitzers, a total of 1,014 pieces.

Against this total, the artillery of the Third Army, the Canadian Corps, and that part of the I. Corps Artillery engaged in the attack consisted of 1,404 18-pdrs., 450 4·5-inch howitzers, 258 60-pdrs., 364 6-inch howitzers, 40 6-inch guns, 124 8-inch howitzers, 148 9·2-inch howitzers, 2 9·2-inch guns, 17 12-inch howitzers, 2 12-inch guns, and 8 15-inch howitzers, a total of 2,817 pieces.

Sketch 5



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The zone to be bombarded was divided into small areas, each marked by some target such as a trench across its centre, so that the shooting of each battery allotted to such an area could be observed without much risk of the fall of its shells being confused with the fire of other batteries. Any tendency to carry out an indiscriminate bombardment in the hope of completely destroying the enemy's defences was to be avoided. Even in the case of woods and villages, only points which appeared to form defensive localities were to be selected.

Wire within their range was to be cut chiefly by the 2-inch trench mortars, aided by the 18-pdrs., which had to account for the more distant wire in the forward zone. This task could not be carried out in the case of the VII. Corps, because it did not close up to the Hindenburg Line until the 2nd April; it lacked time to use trench mortars, or, indeed, even to use 18-pdrs. for the purpose except to a limited extent. The 4.5-inch howitzers were to assist both the 18-pdrs. and also the 6-inch howitzers, which were responsible for the work in the second and third systems of defence, as well as for bombardment of the trench system and counter-battery. The 60-pdrs. were to bombard billets, enfilade tramways and light railways, and sweep communication trenches and unseen approaches. The 6-inch guns were to shell distant billets and communications, ammunition depôts, railheads and headquarters. The 8-inch and 9.2-inch howitzers were to be used for counter-battery and the bombardment of distant trenches; the 12-inch for counter-battery and specially strong points; and the 15-inch mainly for distant villages and bridges. The heavy guns (9.2-inch and 12-inch) were reserved for special distant targets such as a regimental headquarters at Monchy le Preux, sidings at Biache St. Vaast, and junctions of the normal gauge and light railways, with aircraft observation whenever possible.

By night there was to be an inner and an outer zone for harassing fire: the former to be dealt with by 18-pdrs. and 4.5-inch howitzers, the latter by 60-pdrs. and, if necessary, 6-inch howitzers. Fire was to be by battery salvos at irregular intervals, about six per hour on each point which it was considered necessary to keep under fire. The heavy guns were to carry out a similar programme to that of the hours of daylight, but the 8-inch and 9.2-inch howitzers were not to fire by night except for urgent tactical

reasons, and the super-heavy howitzers not in any circumstances.¹

The creeping barrage behind which the infantry would advance was to be fired by 18-pdrs., of which the number available was sufficient for the frontage per gun not to exceed 20 yards. This barrage was to advance at a uniform rate of a one hundred-yard lift every four minutes, each 18-pdr. firing eight rounds in that period, though subordinate commanders were allowed to make such modifications as they chose, provided that they kept within the framework of the scheme. Salvoes of shrapnel were to be fired to mark the beginning of each stage of the infantry advance, after which 50 per cent. shrapnel and 50 per cent. high-explosive were to be employed in the creeping barrage. A standing barrage of 4·5-inch howitzers and 6-inch howitzers was to be formed at Zero hour on the support line of the hostile front trench system, to lift off it on to the next objective as soon as the creeping barrage reached it. A number of 60-pdrs. were to search and sweep all the ground beyond the objective from which musketry and machine-gun fire was likely to be directed against the advancing infantry. A certain amount of bombardment of trenches was to be carried out beyond the creeping barrage during the advance, but the main task of the heavy artillery during this period was counter-battery : destructive fire by the larger calibres, and neutralizing fire, including the blinding of observation posts and the cutting of telephonic communications, by the medium.

¹ For continuous bombardment the rates of fire were : 2-inch trench mortars, 15 rounds per hour ; 9·45-inch trench mortars, 4 rounds per hour ; field guns and howitzers, 3 rounds per battery per minute ; 6-inch howitzers, 1 round per battery per $\frac{1}{2}$ minute ; 8-inch and 9·2-inch howitzers, 1 round per battery per $1\frac{1}{2}$ minutes ; for counter-battery work, for the medium and heavy guns, and for the super-heavy howitzers, according to the circumstances. These figures were subject to an artillery allotment which need only be given in full for the first two days :—

2-inch trench mortars 120 rounds per mortar per day

9·45-inch trench mortars 50 rounds per mortar per day

18-pdrs. 300 rounds per gun per 24 hours (maximum)

4·5-inch howitzers 300 rounds per howitzer per 24 hours (maximum)

60-pdrs. 100 rounds per gun per 24 hours (maximum)

6-inch howitzers 200 rounds per howitzer per 24 hours (maximum)

6-inch guns 100 rounds per gun per 24 hours (maximum)

8-inch and 9·2-inch howitzers 140 rounds per howitzer per day (maximum)

12-inch howitzers 100 rounds per howitzer per day (maximum)

15-inch howitzers 60 rounds per howitzer per day (maximum)

The greater part of the day prior to the attack was devoted to counter-battery work by all siege and heavy artillery, every known hostile gun position and observation post being engaged.

The field artillery of the VI. and XVII. Corps and the left of the VII. Corps would be able to cover the infantry from its battle positions only up to the Blue Line, the second objective, and the batteries would have to move forward during the halt on that line. Similarly, certain batteries of 60-pdrs., and 6-inch howitzers were to be advanced. In their case, however, they would not need to be moved beyond the old front line. For example, the XVII. Corps north of the Scarpe arranged to advance five 6-inch howitzer batteries, two after the capture of the Blue Line, three after that of the Brown, to Roclincourt and the north-eastern outskirts of Arras; and four 60-pdr. batteries after the capture of the Brown Line into the Roclincourt valley, making use of vacated field-artillery positions when possible.

It was arranged to carry out a bombardment with gas shell from 4.5-inch howitzers and 60-pdrs. as late as was consistent with the safety of the assaulting infantry, in order to assist in neutralizing the enemy's batteries and to interfere with the machinery of his command. This was to begin ten hours before Zero with concentrated bursts of lethal gas shell, followed by continuous bombardment with lacrymatory, on batteries, command posts, telephone exchanges, and groups of dug-outs. At an hour and a quarter before Zero all fire with lethal shell was to lift east of the Black Line and to be maintained for an hour, after which the howitzers would cease to use this ammunition and prepare to fire their standing barrage. The 60-pdrs., however, would continue to fire lethal shell against battery positions until an hour after Zero.

The bombardment began at 6.30 A.M. on the 4th April, V day, Z day being, according to the plan, the 8th. A quarter of an hour earlier there was a great discharge of lethal gas by means of cylinders (VI. and XVII. Corps only), Livens projectors, and 4-inch Stokes mortars. Further cylinders were opened on the 6th, when the creeping barrage was also practised.

The extra day's bombardment proved valuable. The 8th April, which was to have been the day of the assault, was sunny and very clear, the finest day of spring so far. Demolition of wire in the forward area and the cutting of lanes further back had not been everywhere wholly satisfactory owing to poor visibility, but a great deal was accomplished on this day. It was felt that the artillery preparation had done all that could have been expected.

The doubtful point was the Brown, or Wancourt—Feuchy line. There had never been a possibility of cutting more than a limited number of lanes in the Wancourt—Feuchy wire ; but wire-cutters and wire-breakers had been issued in great quantities, and the troops had been specially trained in their use. The risk involved in attacking this line on the first day appeared to be fully justified, because a deliberate preparation at short range after the field artillery had been advanced would allow the enemy invaluable time for recovery. Moreover, a large proportion of his field artillery batteries were just behind these defences. On the VII. Corps' right the Brown Line ran from Wancourt to Héninel and was not represented by a trench, but the Hindenburg Line had to be crossed to reach it. Lieut.-General Sir T. D'O. Snow, finding that he could not count on having the Hindenburg wire destroyed here, obtained General Allenby's permission to bring back the Brown Line to the Wancourt—Feuchy line up to where the Hindenburg trenches crossed it, and thence down to St. Martin sur Cojeul. This did not affect the general scheme but lightened the task and the risks of his right flank.

Machine-gun barrages fired over the heads of the advancing infantry had now become universal in offensive operations. In fact, this had now become the more important of the two rôles of the Vickers gun in the attack, that of close support of the infantry having been to a considerable extent taken over by the Lewis gun. Special arrangements were made for detachments to move forward with the two infantry divisions which were to pass through to the capture of the Green Line and give them similar support at this stage. In addition, "forward" guns, in some cases two to a battalion, were attached to the infantry to give close support in case of a check during the advance and to deal with counter-attacks against the captured objectives.

The Third Army was to have the support of 40 tanks of the 1st Brigade (Colonel C. D'A. B. S. Baker-Carr) of what was then known as the Heavy Branch, Machine-Gun Corps. Eight were allotted to the XVII. Corps and 16 each to the other two. After the capture of the Blue Line four tanks were to be transferred from the VII. to the VI. Corps, giving the latter 20 to operate with against the Brown Line.

The tanks were not to take part in the capture of the Black Line, regarding which no difficulty was anticipated. They were to leave their starting points, from a thousand

yards to a mile in rear of the front line, at Zero hour and Sketch 5. to align themselves with the infantry upon the Black Line, or the first objective, two hours later. Four tanks, however, starting from Mercatel on the right, were not to join the infantry until it was about to advance from the Blue Line, which opposite this village was only a thousand yards distant from the Black.¹

It was intended that all the most formidable sections of the defence beyond the Black Line should be attacked by detachments varying in strength from two to ten tanks, according to the nature and importance of the objectives. Thus, four tanks were to advance on Neuville Vitasse, two passing to the south and two to the north of it; four were to be directed on Telegraph Hill, after the capture of which they were to work down the Hindenburg Line to Neuville Vitasse; four were to capture the work known as "The Harp"; four more were to deal with Tilloy lez Mofflaines similarly to Neuville Vitasse; and two, starting from Roclincourt, were to sweep down the valley west of the Bois de la Maison Blanche. After the capture of the Blue Line the tanks were to make for a series of previously-determined rallying points. By far the most important feature of the advance to the Brown Line was to be the attack on the defences of Feuchy Chapel, 18 tanks in all advancing in this direction, and some of them afterwards rolling up the Wancourt—Feuchy line to north and south. Finally, in the advance to the Green Line 20 tanks were to be directed—12 from Wancourt and 8 from Feuchy Chapel—against Monchy le Preux. This last operation, it need hardly be added, represented an aspiration rather than an essential feature of the plan. Its performance depended upon whether petrol could be brought up in time to the rallying points of the Brown Line, and—still more problematical—upon the number of tanks still capable of action.²

The formations of the Royal Flying Corps at the disposal of the Third Army consisted of the Twelfth (Corps) Wing, with four squadrons, one of which was attached to each of the VI., VII., XVII. and XVIII. Corps, for artillery co-operation, photography to a depth of 4,000 yards, close reconnaissance, and contact patrol work; and the Thirteenth (Army) Wing, with five squadrons, for offensive patrols, attacks on balloons, more distant reconnaissance, photography, and night bombing.³ The independent

¹ Appendix 37.

² Appendix 40.

³ Corps Wing Squadrons, 24 machines; Army Wing Squadrons, 16-18.

No. 35 Squadron was attached to the Cavalry Corps. These formations belonged to the III. Brigade R.F.C. (Br.-General J. F. A. Higgins). In addition there was the unbrigaded Ninth Headquarters Wing, operating on the fronts of both the Third and First Armies and consisting of seven squadrons of scouts and fighters, and No. 100 Squadron directly under the orders of H.Q. R.F.C. for night bombing. A balloon company with two balloons was at the disposal of each corps headquarters and one balloon at that of the Cavalry Corps.

A strong air offensive with the object of forcing back the enemy's aircraft and thus giving freedom to the aeroplanes of the Twelfth Wing, began on the 5th April. The inferiority of the British aircraft, which by the opening of the Battle of Arras was only beginning to be remedied,¹ prevented this offensive from being fully successful, and what success was achieved was won only at heavy cost. Thus, in the attacks on German observation balloons five aeroplanes were lost and only the same number of balloons were destroyed, though others were hit by bullets without being set afire. Bombing gave better results, though here also there were considerable casualties. The work in the forward zone, interrupted as it was by the frequent raids of the German fighting flights, was of the greatest value to the Army. The effects of the bombardment were constantly recorded by photographs, and many fresh German batteries were discovered. On the other hand, the enemy did not take advantage of the numerous inviting targets presented to him on the British traffic arteries. Though bombing did not at this period play a prominent rôle in German air strategy, and though the number of German aircraft suitable for it was limited, the offensive spirit of the Royal Flying Corps no doubt contributed to reducing it to a minimum.

ENGINEERS AND ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

Many of the preparations for the offensive at Arras could be made in a comparatively short period before it was launched ; none required so early a start or so long a view as those of the Royal Engineers, including their Signals branch. It had been conclusively proved that

¹ Particularly by the arrival of the Sopwith "Pup" and S.E.5 machines. The latter were not employed until 23rd April, a late stage of the battle. Technical improvements and better tactical handling also made the new Bristol Fighter much more formidable.

unless railways, roads, water supply, and telephonic communications worked efficiently and unless it could be insured that their systems could be rapidly pushed forward into the enemy's lines after the first attacks, opportunities presented by early successes would be lost, and, in fact, no great offensive effort could be continuously maintained.

It will be recalled that after the Inter-Allied Military Conference at Chantilly, Sir Douglas Haig had issued, on the 17th November, general instructions to the Army commanders in which his then plans for an offensive in early 1917 were outlined.¹ Within two days Major-General E. R. Kenyon, Chief Engineer of the Third Army, drew up a list of his larger requirements.

He hoped to have twelve routes to the front in good repair and at the head of each to collect material for about five miles of slab or plank road, with a double track for traffic. For this he would require over 50,000 tons of timber. The great value of the slab road was that it could be laid, even over broken ground, very much faster than a roadway could be repaired, and that while it lasted it provided an excellent surface for all but the heaviest traffic. It was, however, only a temporary substitute for the metalled road, and 1,000 tons of stone was therefore also to be dumped at the head of each of the routes. Major-General Kenyon also demanded fifty miles of light-railway track in the first place and another fifty for renewals and extensions. It was hoped by means of these extensions to link the British light-railway system to that within the German lines on the first day. This would be particularly useful, because the linking of the standard-gauge systems would at best take a considerable time, and it was almost certain that the enemy would effect demolitions in his standard-gauge tracks.

For water supply the Chief Engineer proposed to have six main points, from each of which two 4-inch mains, with tanks and reservoirs along their course where required, would be run forward. For this purpose he needed 1,500 tons of piping. But, as pipe-borne water would not suffice for the most advanced troops, who would generally be too far distant from the pipe-heads to draw from them with their own transport, provision had to be made for the carriage on wheels of large quantities of water. For this purpose a water tank company and an auxiliary petrol company were formed into the Third Army Water Column,

¹ See p. 60.

which had a capacity of 43,700 gallons.¹ In addition a reserve park, with 112 wagons carrying 200-gallon tanks, was divided between the corps. A certain number of extra water-carts were provided by G.H.Q. to supplement the 58 on the establishment of each division. Three thousand two-gallon petrol tins per division were also issued for the carriage of water on all vehicles.

Then there arose the question of accommodating the reinforcements joining the Third Army prior to the battle, some of which would in the first stage be held in reserve. As we remember, it was originally intended to launch the offensive earlier than it actually took place. There was therefore all the more reason to provide shelter and the greatest possible measure of comfort for the troops. On the other hand, in the triangle Arras—St. Pol—Doullens the villages were small and, except for those south of Arras, which had been destroyed, were fully inhabited. Major-General Kenyon therefore asked for over 4,000 Nissen huts, to accommodate 100,000 men. In addition it was hoped to clear the barns quickly by assisting the farmers to thresh their corn and buying the straw for the Army. These barns would then be fitted with beds or bunks of wire-netting on wooden frames and would house a considerable number of troops in unusual comfort. In many cases, too, special water supplies must be arranged in these billeting areas; otherwise the village wells would speedily be drunk dry. Nothing aroused more ill-feeling among the civilian inhabitants, who were generally otherwise on good terms with the British troops.

Major-General Kenyon did not receive nearly all he demanded. As had happened on the Somme, sometimes with unfortunate results, when it was a question of competition for transport between ammunition on the one hand, stone and stores on the other, the engineers went short rather than the gunners.² Writing as late as the

¹ The water tank company had 89 150-gallon and 16 500-gallon tank lorries, besides lorries for clarifying, spares, etc. The auxiliary petrol company had 45 500-gallon tank lorries.

² From 17th March to 9th April, the day of the attack, the situation as regards trains was as follows :—

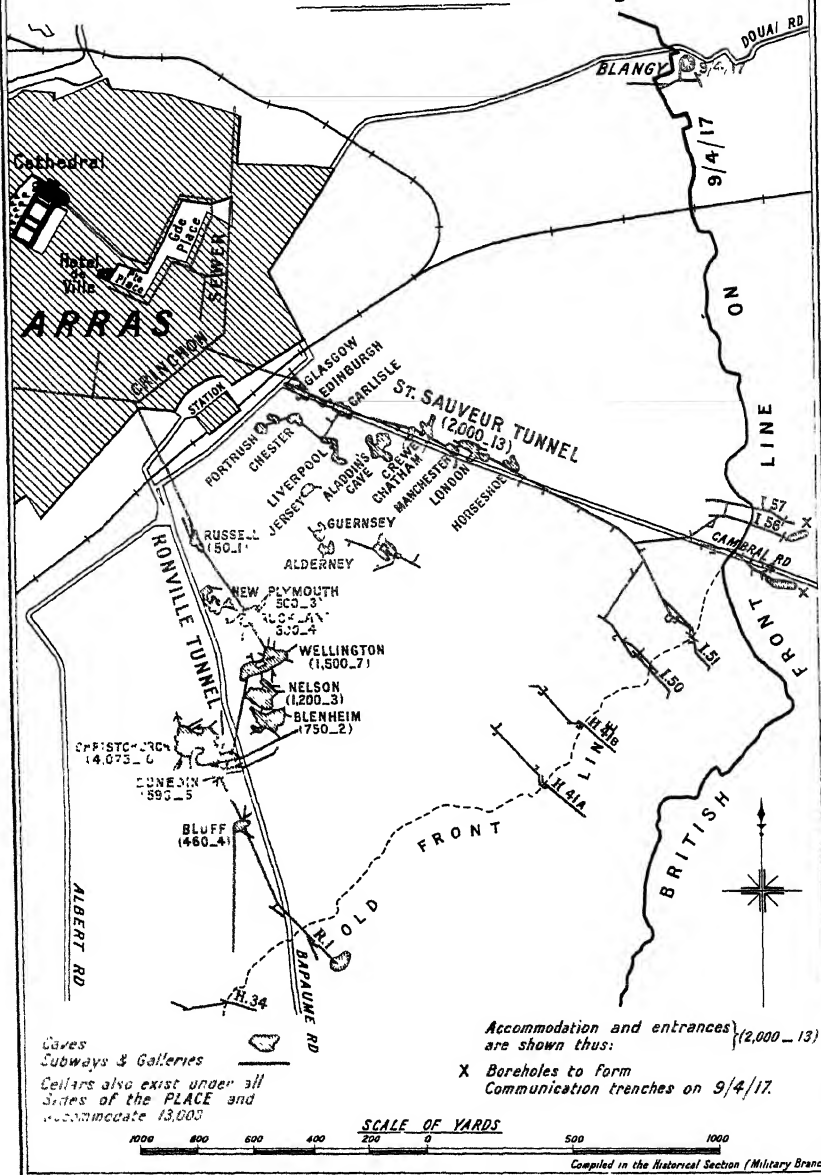
	Asked for	Received
Ammunition Trains .	216	215
Stone „ .	206	125
R.E. Stores „ .	56	35
Railway Material Trains (estimated) .	91	88

Thus, while the full complement of ammunition was received, only about

Sketch 6.

ARRAS, 1917

The Caves and Subways.



27th March to the Engineer-in-Chief, Major-General S. R. Rice, Major-General Kenyon stated that he was doing what he could to accumulate material for road repairs and slab roads, but that so far it was not much, as the Transportation Department could allot him only one train a day. He added, however, that he was cutting in his own area as much forest timber as possible. It was not only lack of trains that hindered this work; the necessity of limiting the number of lorries using the roads during periods of thaw was also an important factor, and it was only by reduction of traffic that the roads were saved from destruction. Generally speaking, all essential stores were ready when the offensive was launched. The one important exception was road metal, only about 10 per cent. of that originally estimated to be necessary for the advance being accumulated and the quantity available for existing roads being small.

When, however, Major-General Kenyon wrote this letter, he had had an opportunity of examining the roads on the right flank in the area which had passed from German to British hands as a result of the Retreat to the Hindenburg Line. This examination inclined him to optimism. The roads in question had obviously not had much traffic on them by comparison with those behind the old British line and were in a better state; the roads serving the present German front might be expected to be so likewise. He considered that if stone were brought up quickly, distributed in small quantities along the roads, and used by parties under skilled gangers to repair the weak places, there should be no great difficulty in keeping the roads open, unless the weather were particularly unfavourable. His intention was that the first rough repairs should be carried out under divisional arrangements. Behind the field companies would move such pioneer and labour battalions as were available, working under the supervision of the Army Troops companies. Tunnelling companies would also be available either for supervision or for work.¹

five-eighths of the stone and R.E. stores was made available. This affected ammunition supply in its turn, because, though the full complement arrived at railhead, it then had to be carried forward over very bad roads. In more than one case the whole personnel of a heavy artillery group had to unload ammunition on the night of 8th April and then clean it before Zero.

¹ There were 16 Army Troops companies—five attached to each corps in the line and one to the XVIII. Corps—four tunnelling companies, three entrenching battalions, eight labour battalions R.E., and 37 labour companies.

Finally, if the advance were considerable, the Transportation Department would extend its activities—a line connecting corps headquarters was its normal forward limit—and take over further sections of the roads.

The German retirement had actually improved the situation as regards the broad-gauge railways. In addition to the St. Pol—Arras and Doullens—Arras lines, the doubling of which was almost though not quite completed, the French were now reconstructing the Albert—Achiet le Petit—Arras line, mainly required for the needs of the Fifth Army, but able to give some assistance to the Third also. Although this railway did not reach Arras until the 16th May, it had crossed the Cojeul at Boisieux au Mont before the beginning of the offensive, and a supply railhead there was almost ready to be opened.

Bridging was a matter of less importance than was usually the case in offensive operations, because the only important streams, the Scarpe and the Cojeul, ran more or less parallel to the line of advance. Bridges for lateral traffic across the Scarpe would, however, be required, and material for the construction of heavy ones was put at the disposal of the XVII. Corps, which was responsible for this work. Two pontoon parks were held in Army reserve.

Within the formerly walled area of Arras, for the most part beneath two squares known as the Grande and the Petite Places, there existed a number of large cellars, often employed in the stormy days of the old city as places of refuge and now largely used for the storage of merchandise. These cellars were cleared, and then provided accommodation for 13,000 men. In addition, beneath the south-eastern suburbs of Ronville and St. Sauveur there was a series of caves, some of them of vast size, formed by quarrying the hard chalk used for the rebuilding of seventeenth-century Arras.¹ These caves were discovered by chance in October 1916, and their value in an offensive was at once perceived. When levelled and cleared of loose chalk, they were large enough to accommodate 11,500 men, the largest of the Ronville series taking 4,000.

Following the course of the ditch of fortified Arras was the Crinchon sewer, eight feet high and six feet wide. It was decided to drive tunnels from the cellars into the sewer

¹ Probably the origin of the cellars was the same, the houses in their case being built actually above the spot from which the material was drawn. The reason why many builders went outside the walls to Ronville and St. Sauveur would seem to have been that the chalk there was particularly hard.

and then from the sewer construct two long tunnels, one through the St. Sauveur system of caves and one through the Ronville. Thus, not only could 24,500 men be lodged in safety, but troops coming through could if necessary use these underground paths to the front line, avoiding the dangerous neighbourhood of the railway station, which was almost certain to be heavily bombarded. The St. Sauveur tunnel, which followed the course of the Cambrai road, ended in five shafts in No Man's Land. The Ronville tunnel proved of very much less value, as its exit in the old No Man's Land was 1,000 yards from the new front after the enemy's withdrawal, and there was no time to prolong it. The caves and tunnels were lit by electricity, provided with water laid on in pipes, and fitted with gas-proof doors at their many entrances. Like the more numerous tunnels on the First Army front, they were used to carry telephone cables and to shelter exchanges and testing-points. A tramline ran from the sewer to the St. Sauveur caves. In one cave a hospital was installed. The main work on this underground system was carried out by the New Zealand Tunnelling Company.

Valuable as was on occasion the modern field wireless-telegraphy apparatus, it had been proved that telegraphy or telephony over cables was more reliable—provided that the cable could be protected from artillery fire and from traffic.¹ Each of the three corps in line had therefore laid from three to five buried cable routes up to the headquarters of infantry and artillery brigades, with extensions made under divisional arrangements thence to battalion headquarters and batteries, and one lateral route. These cable-trenches were proof against direct hits by all calibres up to 5·9-inch howitzers, that is, against something like fifteen-sixteenths of the ordnance employed by the enemy. Only on the right of the VII. Corps—again owing to the German retirement—were there air-lines to two divisions, generally run along the sides of communication trenches. Power buzzers and amplifiers for use with them were also issued to divisions.²

¹ The elaboration of communication for such a battle as this is illustrated by the fact that 750 separate circuits led into the observation post exchange for the VI. Corps heavy artillery off the St. Sauveur tunnel.

² The forecast in March was three power-buzzers and two amplifiers to each division, and these were presumably issued, though there is no evidence that this was done in every case. One buzzer was intended to be brought forward by each division as far as the Brown Line, to establish communication with an amplifier at a brigade headquarters which was to have been moved up to about the German support line.

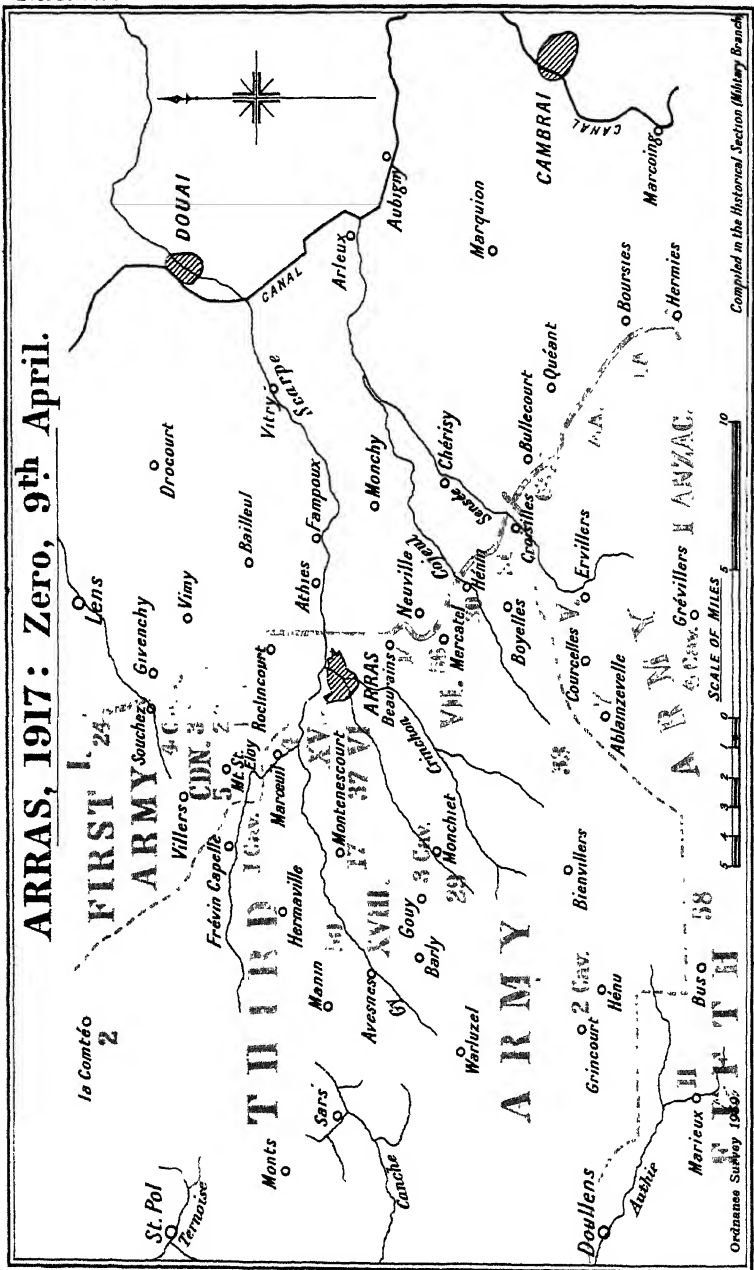
Two trench wireless sets were issued to each division. As it was particularly important that the cavalry should be well equipped for comparatively long-range communication by wireless telegraphy, all horse-drawn and pack W.T. stations available in the theatre of war were grouped to form the Cavalry Corps Wireless Squadron. Pigeons were issued in numbers varying between 126 to the XVII. and 191 to the VII. Corps, as well as to the XVIII. in reserve and the Cavalry Corps. The majority of these birds were to be flown to mobile lofts in the form of converted busses painted black-and-white chequer, but a number of fixed lofts taken over from French inhabitants at Doullens, Gouy en Artois, Savy, and other places were also used.

The arrangements for feeding troops and animals were dependent upon the state of the roads, including those on the German side of the line. If these would bear heavy mechanical transport there would be no serious difficulty. In that case it was estimated that the lorries of the supply columns would be able to take supplies 25 miles from rail-head, and that the horse-drawn divisional trains could take them another 7 miles beyond their refilling points, a total radius of 32 miles which was ten miles more than the distance from Arras to Cambrai along the straight *route nationale*.¹ If the German roads would not carry the lorries it would be necessary to keep the rendezvous of the supply columns for some time behind the old front line and to interpolate the horse-drawn wagons of reserve parks between them and the refilling points of the trains. As on the first two days all roads would be covered by a stream of reinforcements, reserves, artillery and cavalry moving forward, the infantry were to carry one day's ration on the man in addition to the normal iron ration, and two days' more were to be dumped as far forward as possible. Four days' rations and oats were collected by the Army, those for the VI., VII. and XVIII. Corps being dumped in Arras.

Certain other preparations may be briefly mentioned. Spurs or sidings were constructed for the heavy howitzers

¹ That meant, of course, 50 miles for the out and return journey of the lorries. It may be mentioned that in the pre-war "Field Service Regulations" it was laid down that the double journey of the supply columns should not exceed 90 miles. There, however, bombardment of the strength and intensity of this artillery preparation was not foreseen. Nor did the regulation take account of the roads being cut by numerous trenches. In such circumstances as the present 50 miles for the double journey was the maximum which would allow time for running repairs and adequate rest for the drivers.

ARRAS, 1917: Zero, 9th April.



and super-heavy guns on railway mountings, since those in the neighbourhood of Berneville had been rendered useless by the German retirement. Large quantities of stores such as trench bridges—6,000 of these for one corps alone—and ladders were made and brought up. Light signals by the thousand in the form of cartridges for Very pistols, rockets and flares were provided.¹ A barge fitted with a pumping-plant was prepared, to be moved down the Scarpe. Cross-country tracks were cleared for the cavalry round Arras. For the town itself careful arrangements were made to preserve discipline, prevent wanton destruction of property, give gas alarms, and ensure proper sanitation, lack of which might well have produced a pestilence. These and other services caused a heavy demand on man-power. Lieut.-General Haldane, commanding the VI. Corps, estimated that he required considerably over 4,000 troops of all ranks for traffic control, stragglers' posts, salvage, police at railhead and in Arras, working parties at railhead and at ammunition refilling points and dumps, guards for dumps and for prisoners, fatigue duties at the casualty clearing stations, the town major's staff, the fire brigade, and gangs for clearing blocked streets. By far the greater part of these troops had to be found from his four divisions.

THE CONCENTRATION

The troops of the Third Army had to concentrate **Sketch 7.** from a wide rearward area towards a battle-front of about 11½ miles. It was desired to give the divisions in the line as much space as possible, for as long as possible, for the sake both of the training of brigades and battalions in rest and of their general comfort. On the other hand, south of the Scarpe, the three divisions of the XVIII. Corps, two divisions of the Cavalry Corps, and the infantry division attached to the latter had to be brought up in as fresh a state as possible and concentrated well forward by the day of the attack.² In the XVII. Corps area north of

¹ Owing to the risk of confusion with the light signals used by the enemy, it was decided to limit those employed in the offensive to two, meaning "open fire" and "lengthen range". Flares were to be lit by the leading infantry at certain stated hours, to indicate its position to the R.F.C.

² Arrangements were made to bring up four divisions of the XVIII. Corps, as it was not until 6th April that G.H.Q. issued instructions that the 11th Division should not be included and should remain in the Fifth

the Scarpe accommodation had only to be found for one cavalry division, and provided this was done the corps could make more or less its own dispositions.

It was arranged that all troops of the VII. Corps on the right and of the VI. in the centre, including the latter's reserve division, should gradually close up till, on the morning of the day preceding the attack, they were all east of a line from Boiry Ste. Rictude on the Cojeul, through Wailly on the Crinchon, to Agnez les Duisans on the Gy. The 17th Division, to be attached to the Cavalry Corps, was already in the Army area. On the 2nd April the 29th Division; on the 3rd, the 50th; and on the 4th, the 33rd, were to come in to the back areas about Luchaux, Bouque-maison and Flers. They were then to close up by carefully-regulated stages till on the morning of the day preceding the attack the 33rd, 29th and 17th were to be in line close up to the rearward boundary of the forward corps described above, with the 50th round Avesnes le Comte, just behind the 17th.

The faster-moving cavalry divisions were to march two days prior to the attack to the Authie valley between Doullens and Auxi le Château, the Canche valley between Frévent and Conchy, and the Ternoise valley north of St. Pol, respectively. Next day they were to be moved up, by marches of some twenty miles in two cases, to the areas of Pas, Gouy en Artois, and Frévin Capelle. As the result of postponement of the attack for 24 hours the moves of the two final days were all also postponed, and none took place on the 6th April.

There was no interference with the concentration by means of long-range shelling or bombing of back areas, and no bombardment of Arras with gas shell, as might have been expected. On the whole, indeed, the enemy's reply to the British bombardment was feeble. On the first two days, the 4th and 5th April, the German artillery was strikingly inactive. On the 6th and 7th there was a little more fire from his batteries, especially south of the Scarpe, but still not much. On the 8th the 51st Division on the Third Army left was heavily bombarded, but, except for the suburb of Achicourt, where streets were temporarily blocked by fallen houses and a number of lorries were destroyed, hostile batteries were only slightly

Army area (see p. 181). It will be recalled that though only two divisions of the Cavalry Corps were at the disposal of the Third Army, the third was to enter its area.

more active against Arras and its neighbourhood.¹ Raids and patrols, however, showed that the enemy's infantry was alert and had evidently received orders to yield no ground without a fight.

Though the British raiding parties never found it an easy matter to enter the enemy's trenches and in some cases failed to do so, enough prisoners were taken to keep up to date the record of his order of battle, and this was proved on the day of the attack to be correct in all respects, except that in one or two cases boundaries were a little out. In the course of the fortnight before the launch of the British infantry attack the *23rd* and *24th Reserve Divisions*, holding the line astride the Scarpe, from Roclincourt to just south of the Cojeul, were relieved by four fresh divisions, from right to left the *14th Bavarian*, the *11th*, the *17th Reserve*, and the *18th Reserve*. The division north of the *14th Bavarian*, between Thélus and Roclincourt, was the *1st Bavarian Reserve*, which, according to prisoners' reports, had been in line since about the 27th February. Thus four of the five German divisions on the Third Army front were fresh, though the maintenance of the position during the British preliminary bombardment was enough to take the bloom off the best troops very quickly. All these divisions were above the average in quality, and the two Bavarian were held in high respect.² These two, together with *79th Reserve Division*, formed the *Vimy Group*, under the headquarters of the *I. Bavarian Reserve Corps* (General Ritter von Fاسبender), which had its right flank at Givenchy en Gohelle and its left just north of the Scarpe. The *11th*, *17th Reserve* and *18th Reserve Divisions*, together with the *220th Reserve*, which lay outside the front of attack—and in part outside the Third Army boundary—formed the *Arras Group*, which had the staff of the *IX. Reserve Corps* (Lieut.-General Dieffenbach). The *220th Reserve* was the left-hand division of the *Sixth*

¹ The left division of the VII. Corps, the *14th*, reported that during the 24 hours ending at noon on the 8th its artillery fired 16,081 rounds, whereas only 361 rounds were fired by the enemy on its front.

² "Gren.-Reg. No. 10" reports that the British put out a notice with the lines :—

*Den Bayern geben wir Bier und Brot,
Die Schlesier schlagen wir alle tot.*

(As "bread" and "dead" rhyme in English as well as German, this is perhaps a translation.) It was taken as a compliment by the *11th Division*, to which this regiment belonged, but was really expressive rather of dislike; for at this period and from now onwards the British put few troops above the Bavarian.

Army (Colonel-General Freiherr von Falkenhausen), which had its left boundary just north of Bullecourt.

The day before the assault Sir Douglas Haig told Sir William Robertson that never before had he seen his subordinate commanders so hopeful or so well satisfied with the preparations for an attack. In the course of his inspections he had also been repeatedly struck by the self-reliant bearing of the troops; the expression of the men seemed to him as he walked along their ranks bold and proud; they had an air of confidence in their experience and training which he had not seen during his inspections before the Battles of the Somme. There were in the country several divisions recently arrived and unseasoned, but none of these were in the ranks of the Third Army. Apart from them, the divisions of the British Expeditionary Force had in the first half of 1917 reached their highest standard of training since the Force had become a Citizen Army.

There had been many a bitter disappointment in previous offensives. This time, however, the artillery support was far more powerful, by reason not only of the increased number of pieces, especially heavy pieces, and improved technical methods, but also of the more abundant supply of ammunition and the superiority of its quality. The power of the bombardment had deeply impressed the troops who watched it. With knowledge of what was required and experience, staff work, too, had greatly improved. Preliminary movements and arrangements had worked smoothly. The right flank of the VII. Corps was the most doubtful section of the front of assault, because there the difficulties of cutting the wire were particularly great. Apart from that, it seemed to all observers that, whatever the results of the coming battle, at least a measure of success very much greater than in the opening stage of the Somme would be attained. The offensive itself was, however, subsidiary to the much bigger French effort on the Aisne. It was capable of becoming an important contribution to a decisive victory, but of itself alone it could hardly lead to more than a local one.

NOTE

THE GERMANS DURING THE PERIOD OF PREPARATION

From the beginning of March the Germans had observed signs of unusual activity on the fronts of the British First and Third Armies.

In particular, the extension and repair of railways and roads, the increased circulation of trains and lorries, and the arrival of artillery were noted. The artillery was also livelier, though at first not to any great extent. From the 19th of the month counter-measures were taken.¹ Reinforcements were brought up; fresh divisions, heavy artillery, aircraft and machine-gun detachments. In addition to the new divisions placed in line astride the Scarpe, Crown Prince Rupprecht put five reserve divisions at the disposal of the *Sixth Army*.² "Mountains of shell" rose in the dépôt at Douai. Work on the defences was carried out day and night with all the labour available.

It was rather late; for the commencement of this work coincided with a further increase in the British artillery activity, which largely nullified it. The new divisions which were put into the line complained that their predecessors had neglected the trenches and wire; now the bombardment, combined with the bad weather, made adequate repair almost impossible. The strain upon the troops was severe in the extreme. Even before the real British artillery preparation began battery after battery was put out of action.³

From the 4th April onwards the situation was naturally far worse. The gas discharge of that morning temporarily silenced the greater proportion of the German artillery. Of the two German divisions chiefly affected, casualties do not seem to have been very high in the *11th*; but prisoners afterwards stated that in the *14th Bavarian* they had been serious, and that the discharge had had a demoralizing effect. It is of interest to note that it was this division whose infantry surrendered most readily on the 9th April.⁴ The forward trenches became lines of shell-holes, and those in rear suffered only a little less seriously. The enemy realized the method under which the preparation was carried out: a Bavarian battalion commander put it that the battlefield had been divided up like a chess-board among the heavy batteries.⁵ Section by section, the defences were systematically reduced. The wire, bad to begin with, disappeared altogether in many places, and fresh stocks to repair it could not be brought forward. It took six hours to bring up rations from the regimental headquarters to the front line, a distance of about a mile in most cases, and towards the end of the bombardment none could be moved in certain sections. From the 6th to the 8th the *51st Regiment* had no news at all from one of its companies in first line. On the latter morning a patrol got through to it, to return with a report that the defences were destroyed, that the men had been without sleep and almost without food since the beginning of the bombardment, and that losses were heavy. To judge by those of the *10th Grenadier Regiment* in the same division, they do not appear, however, to have been of a crippling nature. This regiment had 181 casualties during the bombardment. The enemy had

¹ "Die Osterschlacht" i., p. 21.

² Kuhl ii., p. 83. It is stated in "Die Osterschlacht" i., p. 22, that there were nine divisions in reserve to the *Sixth and First Armies*, three of the latter being available if necessary to reinforce the former.

³ "Gren.-Regt. No. 10", p. 181. This regiment belonged to the *11th Division*, the other two regiments of which also give in their histories many details of the overwhelming effect of the British fire.

⁴ See "Gas!", by Major-General C. H. Foulkes, p. 212.

⁵ "Die Osterschlacht" i., p. 30.

numerous deep dug-outs on this front, and these were not destroyed, though the entrances were frequently blown in.

The effects of the counter-battery fire were equally serious. By the 6th April the *11th Division* did not possess a single battery able to develop its full fire-power. The harassing fire on communications seems to have been very effective. Those mountains of ammunition did not reach the battery positions from Douai, and much of the heavy artillery made available by the retreat to the Hindenburg Line remained parked there. Not only was the reply of the German artillery to the British bombardment feeble, as has been stated, but when the actual infantry assault took place a disastrous shortage of shell was experienced.

In brief, the German accounts go to prove that there was in fact a large measure of surprise. Three weeks' warning is ample for the provision of reserves ; but, if the forward dumps of ammunition and wire are not already full, it is in these conditions quite inadequate in other respects to prepare to meet a great offensive, in face of such a programme of destructive and harassing fire as the British developed on this occasion.

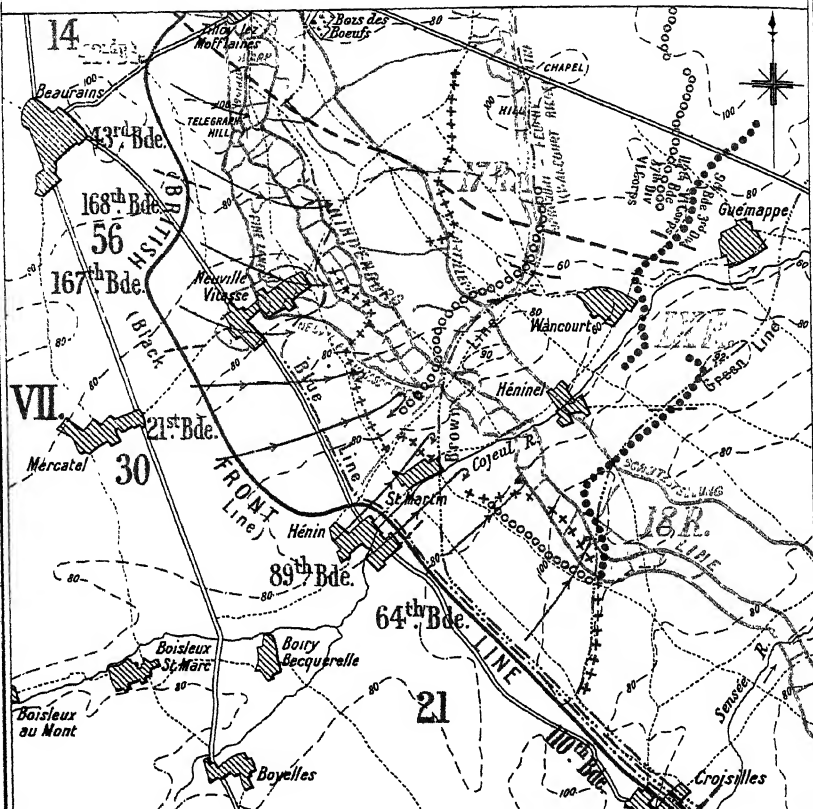
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Sketch 8.

ARRAS

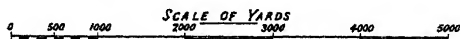
ATTACK OF VII CORPS

9th – 12th April, 1917.



REFERENCE.

British Line, Night 9th April.....+++++ British Line, Night 12th April.....●●●●●
 " " " 10th April.....○○○○○ Germans.....Green



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch).

CHAPTER VIII

THE BATTLES OF ARRAS 1917: THE FIRST BATTLE OF THE SCARPE, 9TH APRIL

(Maps 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 ; Sketches A, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11)

ATTACK OF THE VII. CORPS

EASTER MONDAY of the year 1917 must be accounted ^{Maps 3, 4.} from the British point of view one of the great days of the War. It witnessed the most formidable and at the same ^{Sketches A, 7, 8.} time most successful British offensive hitherto launched. On the fronts of the Third and First Armies there were actually only the same number of divisions—fourteen—in line as on the 1st July 1916, the opening day of the Battles of the Somme, but the armament supporting the attack was very much more powerful. The advantages gained were far greater. With Messines and Cambrai in the same year and two or three of the attacks of August and September 1918, the first day's operations of the Battles of Arras were among the heaviest blows struck by British arms in the Western theatre of war.

In an area about thirteen miles square, diminishing as reserves closed up in the course of the day, there were some 350,000 troops of the Third Army. The concentration was, of course, thickest in the forward zone, where ten divisions, with all their artillery and a large proportion of the heavy artillery, lay in a zone ten miles long by two miles deep, let us say, 200,000 men to twenty square miles. But it was in the eastern third of this zone that the great bulk of the infantry of these divisions was massed; for here over two-thirds of the battalions were assembled in the existing trenches or in narrower slits specially dug for the occasion. One of the chief anxieties of the anxious night of the 8th April was lest the enemy should, just prior to the assault, open a heavy bombardment upon this crowded area.

That he did not do so was due to several causes : the large number of his batteries neutralized by British fire ; the effective manner in which the heads of his observers had been kept down by that fire, which, in many cases at least, had prevented them from even noticing the assembly trenches ; the British command of the air, which had kept back his reconnaissance aircraft ; and, above all, the belief of his local Army command that the attack was not due for about another week. This belief was destined to have an important effect upon the fortunes of the day.

Easter Sunday's promise of an improvement in the weather was belied, though the excellent observation then obtained, almost for the first time, and the effect of the sun in drying the roads had been valuable. The night was cold, and Monday morning was punctuated by squalls of rain, sleet and snow, with a long and heavy snow-shower at night. The disadvantages of the weather must not be exaggerated ; for the intervals between the showers were often bright and clear, while, on the other hand, on several occasions snow driven by a high westerly wind into the faces of the Germans gave a distinct advantage to the attack. Nevertheless, the heavy showers on roads thronged with traffic had a very harmful effect ; the trenches in which the attackers assembled, as well as those which were their objectives, were often knee-deep in liquid mud ; large areas, especially those which had been badly cut up by bombardment, became impassable by tanks ; and the troops were chilled as well as wet. Great-coats had been left behind by General Allenby's order, as it appeared to him that, especially if sodden with wet, they would have added unbearably to the already crushing burdens carried into action.¹ These varied slightly from one division to another, while "specialists" in all of them had their own equipment ; but the average infantryman, in addition to his rifle, bayonet, entrenching tool, full water-bottle, waterproof sheet and haversack (on the back, in place of the pack) with two days' rations and a few necessities, carried 170 rounds of ammunition, two Mills bombs, one ground flare and three sandbags. A large

¹ Major-General C. L. Nicholson (34th Division, XVII. Corps) ordered his men to wear great-coats and leave behind the waterproof sheets carried by other divisions, whether with or without permission it is not stated. In the 152nd Brigade (51st Division, XVII. Corps) the 6/Gordon Highlanders wore great-coats and the 6/Seaforth Highlanders leather jackets in the assembly trenches, collecting and dumping them shortly before the assault. Some battalions wore the jackets in the attack.

proportion carried either a pick or a shovel—in which case the entrenching tool was often discarded—and wirecutters. With uniform and steel helmet, the small or slightly-built man carried on his person certainly half his own weight. Wire and pickets were generally carried by special parties. As had happened on previous occasions, many men rid themselves of their burdens at an early stage in the advance.

No troops could have been in better heart. Failure to complete a very ambitious programme was due—especially on the right, where most apparent—to the extreme difficulty of the task and, more rarely, to errors and lack of co-operation between units, partly attributable to casualties among officers. Nowhere was there any lack of resolution, while again and again whole units performed actions of exceptional daring and devotion.

It is of interest to note how large was the Scottish element in the Third Army, especially in the infantry of the ten divisions in the first line. There were twelve Scottish battalions in each of the 15th and 51st Divisions; nine (counting the South African Scottish) in the 9th; six (counting four Tyneside Scottish battalions of the Northumberland Fusiliers) in the 34th; three in the 3rd; one in the 30th; and one (the London Scottish) in the 56th: a total of 44 battalions out of 120.

Owing to the German retreat, the right of the VII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir T. D'O. Snow, headquarters, Fosseux, nine miles W.S.W. of Arras) was now facing the Hindenburg Line, and even its left was in possession of the old German first system of defence, which on all but a fraction of the rest of the Army front constituted the first objective. This corps, therefore, attacked in echelon from the left. It may at first sight appear strange that it was not called upon to launch an assault upon the Hindenburg Line at the Army zero hour. Judging purely by the map, this might appear to have promised the greatest advantage, but it was, in fact, out of the question. The Hindenburg Line was so strong, and the time for preparation and bombardment had been so short, that the best hope of success lay in postponing the attack on the right as long as possible, so that the enemy should be shaken by events further north earlier in the day.¹

It will avoid confusion if we follow the normal custom of recording the operations from right to left, though in thus dealing first with the less successful flank the reader

¹ VII. Corps Instructions are given in Appendix 28.

may be given an unduly pessimistic impression. It must, however, be borne in mind that the attacks of the VII. Corps were carried out in succession from left to right, and that each formation saw the one on its left go forward before its own hour came.

After the German retirement had taken place, Lieut.-General Snow did not desire to launch a frontal attack all along his line. His scheme was to break through at Neuville Vitasse and Telegraph Hill with his two left divisions, his right meanwhile pushing forward small columns, seeking to gain all the ground possible, but making no assault on the Hindenburg Line. However, General Allenby did not approve of these dispositions and directed that the two right divisions should also attack frontally. It was in these circumstances that Lieut.-General Snow obtained permission to draw back the Brown Line on his front to St. Martin and Hénin.¹ And it was with his leave that Major-General D. G. M. Campbell, commanding the 21st Division on the extreme right, issued orders that if the Hindenburg wire were insufficiently cut a line should be established in front of it while gaps were being made by the fire of artillery and Stokes mortars.

The Corps Heavy Artillery (Br.-General K. K. Knapp) consisted of eleven groups containing eighteen 6-inch howitzer, seven 8-inch howitzer, nine 9.2-inch howitzer, four 12-inch howitzer, one 15-inch howitzer, eight 60-pdr. and two 6-inch gun batteries, together with one 9.2-inch and one 12-inch gun. All the artillery, field and heavy, at the disposal of the VII. Corps was under the command of the C.R.A., Br.-General C. M. Ross-Johnson.²

The 21st Division (headquarters, Adinfer Wood) held a wide frontage, from the Sensée at Croisilles to the Cojeul at Hénin, a distance of 4,500 yards, but was to attack only on a front of 2,700 yards, its right brigade standing fast. The artillery of the 58th Division was attached to its own, which was commanded by Br.-General R. A. C. Wellesley, and it also had a direct call on the XLVI. Heavy Artillery Group, of three 6-inch howitzer batteries. The creeping barrage of 18-pdrs. was to come down short of the German wire and advance at the rate of 50 yards a

¹ See p. 186.

² III., VIII., XXXV., XXXIX., XLVI., LIV., LVIII., LIX., LXVI., LXXIII., LXXXV. Heavy Artillery Groups. The 9.2 and 12-inch guns were not in batteries. The 12-inch and 15-inch howitzers had two pieces to a battery. All the other natures mentioned above were four-gun batteries, except the 60-pdrs., which were six-gun.

minute, with pauses on the wire, on each trench-line, and 200 yards beyond the second trench. It was to remain there until an hour after the time of the assault and then resume its progress as far as two new trenches, 500 and 700 yards in rear of the Hindenburg Line. Standing barrages by 18-pdrs. and 4.5-inch howitzers were to be fired beyond the "creeper" and employed to cover the right flank, and a smoke barrage was to be put on the Hindenburg front trench prior to the assault.

In this case the assault did not take place till mid-afternoon, 4.15 P.M. Nerve-racking must have been the period of waiting, facing the Hindenburg Line in the wet assembly trenches on both sides of the partly sunken Croisilles—St. Martin road or in the road itself, the more so as the attack was to be cancelled in the event of failure on the VI. Corps front. The 64th Brigade (Br.-General H. R. Headlam) advanced at 3.54 P.M. with three battalions, 1/East Yorkshire, 15/Durham L.I., and 9/K.O.Y.L.I., in line. They moved in section columns, maintaining this formation up to the enemy's wire, a thousand yards away, because there were known to be but a few gaps in it. The steadiness and resolution of their advance across this rising and open ground won the hearty admiration of their right-hand neighbours of the V. Corps. The German barrage was prompt but weak.

A sudden burst of traversing fire from a machine-gun section which had been pushed forward under cover of darkness to the sunken St. Martin—Fontaine road apparently kept down the heads of the garrison. Some of the columns passed through the double belt of wire without difficulty, but others found their gaps insufficiently cut. At these points Stokes mortars, which had moved with the battalions, were quickly brought into action and enabled the leading companies of the right and centre battalions to make their way in and capture the trench. The rear companies then passed through, but found it impossible to penetrate the wire in front of the second trench and had to fall back again to the first. On the left, the 9/K.O.Y.L.I. had even worse fortune, and was unable to pass through the second belt of wire covering the front trench. Nor were the efforts of the Durham L.I. to bomb its way up this trench successful. The brigade of the 30th Division on the left having failed to reach the Hindenburg Line, the enemy now resisted stoutly and even launched counter-attacks with the bomb, though these were all defeated.

The net result was, then, the capture of some two-thirds of the first objective, the front trench of the Hindenburg Line, in itself a remarkable feat of arms.

The 30th Division (Major-General J. S. M. Shea, headquarters, Blaireville) attacked with two brigades in line, the right being destined to assault simultaneously with the 64th Brigade on its right at 4.15 p.m., while the left was to go forward in time to enter the Hindenburg Line much earlier, at 12.55 p.m., provided that the 56th Division on its left had by then reached its Blue Line by the capture of Neuville Vitasse. This line, which followed the Hénin—Neuville road, was here more or less arbitrary, and no pause was to be made upon it. After crossing the Hindenburg Line—and in the case of the left brigade the Wancourt—Feuchy line also—the two brigades were to capture the villages of Héninel and Wancourt, and afterwards to occupy the Green Line, on the high ground east of the Cojeul.

The divisional artillery (Br.-General G. H. A. White) had been reinforced by the CL. and CLV. Army Brigades. The general rate of the creeping barrage was to be 100 yards in three minutes, with pauses on and beyond the successive objectives; this was to be reduced to 100 yards in six minutes for the final advance on Héninel and Wancourt.

At 1.30 a.m. on the 9th six platoons of the 2/Bedfordshire (89th Brigade) had seized St. Martin, as a preliminary to the attack. Hitherto it had been possible to observe the fire of the wire-cutting batteries only from a distance too great to make sure of the effect. Next morning, however, observers in the captured village obtained a rather better view, and as it seemed that the heavy batteries had not done the work thoroughly, 18-pdrs. were turned on, though the range was too long for really good results. Another night operation, in this case by detachments from each brigade, against two mills on the Hénin—Neuville road, was a failure.

The 89th Brigade (Br.-General the Hon. F. C. Stanley) was to attack the Hindenburg Line with the 19/King's on the right and the 20/King's on the left, the former battalion having the subsequent task of capturing Héninel. The 2/Bedfordshire was in support, and the 17/King's provided carrying parties and "moppers up". As the troops waited, they could see to the north the welcome spectacle of their comrades of the 56th Division swarming over Neuville Vitasse. Their own approach movement

was not interfered with, and they reached St. Martin soon after 3.30 P.M. The men went forward with confidence, but the attack was a failure. It was everywhere held up by terrific machine-gun fire short of the Hindenburg wire, which, into the bargain, was now seen to be virtually untouched. The two battalions, after suffering over two hundred casualties apiece, at first established themselves in shell-holes more or less on the line which marked the limit of their advance. When, however, it became clear to the brigade commander that a fresh bombardment would be necessary before the assault could be renewed and that his troops were too close up for this to be carried out, he ordered them to withdraw under cover of darkness to the northern outskirts of St. Martin.

The 21st Brigade (Br.-General G. D. Goodman), which had begun its advance at 11.38 A.M., had met with no better fortune. The 2/Wiltshire and 18/King's deployed on reaching the sunken Hénin—Neuville road, where they encountered some resistance. On crossing it they came under an artillery barrage and immediately afterwards met with heavy machine-gun fire. Both, and especially the Wiltshire, suffered severe loss,¹ and when the wire was reached there was not weight enough left in the attack to penetrate the few gaps that existed. The remnants of the two battalions then fell back to the St. Martin—Neuville road, where they were joined by the 19/Manchester, and there dug in. As it had been reported—almost certainly in error—that some troops had entered the Hindenburg Line on the right, the last-named battalion was ordered to send a party of bombers down the Wancourt—Feuchy line to their aid; but it was unable to make any progress by this means. At 7.20 P.M. Br.-General Goodman sent a message to the Manchester directing that during the night strong bombing parties should work down from the front of the 56th Division on the left, where the Hindenburg Line had been entered. Of the four tanks of D Battalion, supporting the 30th Division, three had reached their starting-point at Mercatel. One of these was bogged soon after leaving the sugar factory south of Neuville Vitasse and the other two in or about Neuville Vitasse Trench, which ran from the southern outskirts of the village to the Hindenburg Line.

The 56th Division (Major-General C. P. A. Hull,

¹ This battalion had 342 casualties, not counting 37 in the morning attack on one of the mills.

headquarters, Agny) had not to go beyond the Brown Line, here the Wancourt—Feuchy system, and had, in fact, to capture it on a front of only 350 yards. Its objectives were, however, extremely formidable. First there was the big and strongly fortified village of Neuville Vitasse ; immediately behind this ran the Hindenburg Line, here in part a triple line of trenches ; and then, after an advance of nearly a mile across the open, the heavily-wired Wancourt—Feuchy system. The division was to attack with the 167th Brigade on the right and the 168th on the left at 7.45 A.M. As the final objective was so narrow, the 168th Brigade was to halt on the Hindenburg Line, the advance to the Wancourt—Feuchy defences being carried out by a single battalion of the 167th.

The divisional artillery (Br.-General R. J. G. Elkington) was more powerfully reinforced than those of the two right-hand divisions of the corps, the 50th Division artillery and the CCXCIII. Army Brigade being at the disposal of the C.R.A. The barrage was to move at 100 yards in four minutes, or in six minutes through Neuville Vitasse itself. Four tanks, two moving either side of the village, were to advance simultaneously with the infantry. Neuville Mill, on the Neuville—Mercatel road, was held by a German outpost detachment, well placed to enfilade the advance. As an attempt to capture it on the night of the 6th had failed, it was arranged that one of the tanks should attack it directly the advance began.

The 167th Brigade (Br.-General G. H. Freeth) had the 3/London on the right and the 8/Middlesex on the left, these battalions having the task of capturing the southern half of Neuville Vitasse. The 1/London was to pass through them in two waves, the first to capture the front Hindenburg Trench, and the second the other two lines of trenches and the sunken road beyond them. Finally, the 7/Middlesex was to capture the Wancourt—Feuchy line.

Two platoons of the 3/London with a half-section of the 167th Light Trench-Mortar Battery and supported by one tank attacked Neuville Mill as a separate operation, and took it without difficulty. This battalion fought its way through Neuville, every step being according to programme, and reached its final objective, the Blue Line. The 8/Middlesex had harder work. It was held up in front of the second of its four objectives, the church and the parallelogram of trenches round it, by a "pocket" of the enemy protected by wire which had been hidden by the

houses and had not been cut. After a sharp fight it took the place with 68 prisoners and four machine guns. Having lost the barrage, it was only with difficulty that the battalion struggled up to the Blue Line, which it did not reach till 4 P.M. The delay, however, had no serious consequences, as the 1/London was able to pass through south of the contested area.

On the left the 168th Brigade (Br.-General G. G. Loch) was equally successful. A fairly heavy German barrage came down too late to catch the waves of the assaulting battalions, the 13/London (Kensington) and 12/London (The Rangers). The latter battalion was checked in front of Pine Lane, a trench running northward from Neuville, and suffered heavy casualties.¹ Then a tank came up and rolled down enough of the wire to let the right company through, while simultaneously a party from the left gallantly forced its way into a gap, put a machine gun out of action, and captured its section of the trench.

Without waiting for the village to be cleared, eight of the twenty batteries supporting the division began at 8.50 A.M. to move forward to positions south of Beaurains in order to support the attack on the Hindenburg Line. This was launched at 12.10 P.M. by the 1/London (167th Brigade) on the right and the 14/London (London Scottish) on the left.

The 1/London cleared Neuville Vitasse Trench, but suffered heavily in doing so. The 7/Middlesex, moving up for its advance to the Wancourt—Feuchy line, found the Londoners held up in front of the Hindenburg Line and went to their aid. The first Hindenburg trench was carried, but the troops had “bunched” and were not in touch with the 14/London on their left. The right and centre companies of the latter battalion were likewise delayed in the first trench; the left lost direction and bore away into the area of the 14th Division, swept straight through all three lines of trenches without a pause, capturing about 150 prisoners in the process, and went on nearly another 600 yards in the open. After this feat, perhaps bewildered by its own success, it fell back to the front trench of the Hindenburg Line. The 14/London was then ordered to clear the remainder of these trenches, which were still occupied by a few machine guns, with the bomb. The

¹ On the 8th Major-General Hull had informed the corps commander that the wire in front of Pine Lane and in the village of Neuville had been insufficiently cut and that he was carrying out an extra preparation. Much of this wire was difficult to observe.

7/Middlesex twice assaulted the support trench, but no progress could be made in face of machine-gun fire from the right, where the Germans were still installed in the Hindenburg Line. On this flank too the affair resolved itself into a series of bombing attacks up communication trenches, which lasted most of the night.

The 56th Division had advanced 2,000 yards, had captured 612 prisoners, and had the comparatively low casualty list of 881 all ranks. Moreover, only six of its battalions had been seriously engaged, and its reserve brigade was intact.

The task of the 14th Division (Major-General V. A. Couper, headquarters, Warlus) was particularly formidable. About the centre of its zone of attack, on the northern slope of Telegraph Hill, the Hindenburg Line entered the old German support system. Just north of the junction lay a very serious obstacle, a redoubt known from its shape as "The Harp", a thousand yards long from north to south and half that distance in depth. Down the centre ran a single trench appropriately known as "The String". About one-third of this work fell within the zone of the 14th Division, the remainder being in that of the 3rd Division on its left. Fourteen tanks¹ from C and D Battalions were to support the 14th Division and the right flank of the 3rd against Telegraph Hill, the Harp and the Hindenburg Line.

The artillery support consisted of the divisional artillery of the 14th (Br.-General E. Harding-Newman) and 37th Divisions and the XLVIII. and CCXXXII. Army Brigades, disposed for the occasion in five groups. The creeping barrage was to come down two to three hundred yards short of the enemy's line at 7.34 A.M., and at the same time the leading wave of the infantry was to close up to it, so as to be on its skirts when it reached the German defences. The position and shape of Telegraph Hill presented a problem to the artillery, but it was estimated that the fire of the most advanced batteries would clear the heads of the infantry as they topped it by a few feet. After the capture of the Blue Line—here the second trench of the Hindenburg Line and the eastern side of the Harp—a protective

¹ Four from D Battalion supported the right brigade. The remaining ten from C Battalion all started in the 14th Division area north of Beaurains, but the objectives of two were in the area of the 3rd Division (VI. Corps) and those of two more were just on the boundary between the two divisions. In the later phase, the attack on the Wancourt—Feuchy line, all the tanks of C Battalion were to assist the VI. Corps.

barrage was to be formed 300 yards east of it, the infantry again closing up for the advance to the Brown or Wancourt—Feuchy line. This was to begin at 12.30 P.M., the barrage lifting off the first Wancourt—Feuchy trench at 1.55. Batteries could fire this barrage from their original positions, but when it reached the Wancourt—Feuchy line they would be shooting at 6,000 yards. When the infantry arrived on the Blue Line, therefore, one group was to advance to a position south of Telegraph Hill, where it was expected to be in action before the infantry reached its final objective, and a second was to be ready to move at short notice.

The attack on the Blue Line was to be carried out by the 43rd Brigade on the right and the 42nd on the left. Each had two battalions in line, but whereas those of the right brigade were to capture the whole objective, the Hindenburg Line, the final objective of those of the left was the String, and another battalion was to go through to take the eastern side of the Harp. A single battalion of the 43rd was then to advance to the Brown Line, while two companies of the 42nd captured some trenches on its left, occupied a large triangular area between its zone of advance and that of the 3rd Division, and kept touch with that division. The 41st Brigade was to remain in the caves until the advance began. Before dawn parties went out and cut a number of gaps in the German wire, still a formidable barrier even in the front line.

On the front of the 43rd Brigade (Br.-General P. R. Wood) the strong redoubt half way between the front line and the Hindenburg Line was found to be little damaged, but the 6/K.O.Y.L.I. was powerfully aided by three tanks, which broke down the wire. The 10/Durham L.I., on the left, suffered heavily in capturing the front line, but both battalions fought their way forward and took the Hindenburg Line. Viewing the battlefield from right to left, as we are, it is on reaching the front of the 14th Division that we first find reports of a considerable demoralization among the enemy. This becomes even more striking further north. In the zone of the 43rd Brigade, even in the Hindenburg trenches, the Germans in many cases remained in their dug-outs, only awaiting an opportunity to surrender. As had often happened on the Somme, however, a few stout-hearted machine gunners in good emplacements took toll of the assailants. The artillery fire was of the slightest, though one 105-mm. howitzer, which fired all day, caused a

great deal of trouble to artillery debouching from Beaurains.

On the right of the 42nd Brigade (Br.-General F. A. Dudgeon) the 5/Oxford and Bucks L.I. reached its objective, the String, after hard fighting in which its Lewis gunners and rifle grenadiers put three machine guns out of action. On the left the 9/K.R.R.C. first secured a footing in the String at either end of its objective and then bombed inwards, finally clearing the trench at 8.20 A.M. and taking 60 prisoners in its dug-outs. The battalion's total captures were nearly two hundred. Without being delayed by this fighting, the 5/Shropshire L.I. passed through and captured the Blue Line by 8.45.

The tanks of No. 10 Company, D Battalion, had, as we have seen, given useful aid both to the 56th Division and the right brigade of the 14th, though little to the 30th. They had, however, suffered heavy casualties, eight out of the twelve having been bogged or put out of action by hits. No. 8 Company, C Battalion, was less effective, though its reports state that three of its tanks did good work. According to the 42nd Brigade, on the other hand, such tanks as reached the String, where their help was most required, arrived late, and several observers state that even when the tanks remained in action they appeared to stick every few yards. The ground on which the Harp redoubt was constructed had been very heavily bombarded, with the consequence that, out of ten tanks of this company which started, seven were bogged. The remaining three were put out of action, two by shells and the third by bombs thrown under the tracks.

At 11.30 A.M. the 6/Somerset L.I. of the 43rd Brigade moved up from its assembly trenches, and an hour later began its attack behind the new barrage. No tanks were supporting it directly, though a few of those still available were moving against the Feuchy Chapel works on its left. The battalion had not counted on its left being fully covered, as the companies of the 9/Rifle Brigade on that flank were echeloned slightly to the rear; but owing to the 56th Division having been checked, there were, in fact, no troops on its right either. The leading wave advanced to about 600 yards from its objective, but was then swept by enfilading and reverse machine-gun fire, and fell back 400 yards to a trench which had only just been discovered.¹

¹ This was the "Artillerieschutzstellung", and its name describes its purpose. It is shown on no British map and was in parts only knee-deep and perhaps not continuous. It is plotted on Maps 4, 5 and 7.

There the company of the London Scottish, whose adventures have been described, appeared on its right flank, and then disappeared.

Major-General Couper determined to renew the attack, in conjunction with the 3rd Division, before the fall of darkness. It was arranged that the heavy artillery should bombard the Wancourt—Feuchy line, and that a creeping barrage should be formed, to lift off the front trench at 7 P.M. The times of despatch and receipt of the “preliminary instructions” to the 43rd Brigade are given as 5.45 and 5.50 P.M., so these instructions were almost certainly telephoned by the General Staff. At 6 P.M. Br.-General Wood ordered Lieut.-Colonel F. D. Bellew, commanding the 6/Somerset L.I., to take the brigade reserve battalion, the 6/Cornwall L.I., under his orders and carry out the attack with the two battalions. The order reached the battalion commander at 6.25 and his company commanders at 6.55. The only chance of success would have been to press in on the skirts of the barrage—and even then the prospects would have been poor, with the 56th Division over twelve hundred yards in rear and German machine guns firing into the backs of the attackers. In the circumstances, there was, of course, no time for such action, and the attack broke down after gaining a very small amount of ground.

Messages, however transmitted, move slowly on the battlefield, but in this instance it may be said that they moved as fast as could have been expected in trench warfare and that not even reasonable time had been allowed.¹

It was now obvious, in the first place, that no further attack could be launched before the morrow and, in the second, that the two left divisions of the VII. Corps must assist the two on the right wing, which were held up in front of the Hindenburg Line. At 10.40 P.M., therefore, Lieut.-General Snow issued orders that at daylight the Wancourt—Feuchy line should be bombarded by all available guns; that at 8 A.M. the 56th and 14th Divisions should attack, simultaneously with the 3rd Division, the co-operation of which had been arranged with Lieut.-General

¹ It should be added that Br.-General Wood, who had heard of the appearance of the London Scottish company on his right, does not seem to have realized how far in rear the 56th Division was. In his message directing Lieut.-Colonel Bellew to issue orders to the 6/Cornwall L.I. for a new attack he added, “and to the London Scottish, if they can co-operate, “to cover his right flank”.

Haldane, commanding the VI. Corps; that the 56th Division should take over the left of the 30th Division's original objective, that is, from the point where the Wancourt—Feuchy line crossed the Hindenburg Line to the 30th Division's former left boundary on the Tilloy—Héninel road; and that the 14th Division should take over the original frontage of the 56th in addition to its own. The corps commander directed that the 21st and 30th Divisions should support this attack with artillery fire but should not themselves attack until the Wancourt—Feuchy line had been taken; when that was accomplished they were to capture the Hindenburg Line and the village of Héninel, and the 14th Division was to capture Wancourt. Meanwhile all ground gained was to be made secure against counter-attack.

Lieut.-General Snow's opinion that a frontal attack by the 21st and 30th Divisions stood small chance of success and that the way would have to be opened for them by the 56th and 14th on the left had been but too amply confirmed. Only these two latter had gained any considerable success, and it was evident that on them would largely depend the future progress of their neighbours. They themselves had made advances of nearly a mile and a half and nearly two miles, respectively, and had overrun powerful German defences. The casualties had been light by the standard of past major offensives, averaging less than one thousand a division.¹

ATTACK OF THE VI. CORPS

The task of the VI. Corps (Lieut.-General J. A. L. Haldane, headquarters, Noyelle Vion, nine miles west of Arras), which was to carry out the attack between Tilloy lez Mofflaines and the Scarpe, was more straightforward than that of the VII. Except for a few hundred yards on its right, it had been unaffected by the German retirement and held its old trenches. This meant that it had no such difficulties of communication as had the VII. Corps. A 60-cm. railway, too, was carrying up 100 tons of heavy artillery ammunition daily, thus relieving roads of some of the heaviest traffic. The main objective of the corps,

¹ The casualties are rarely compiled for the same period, and only in the case of the 56th Division is there a statement for the 9th April—881 all ranks. From the 9th to the 12th April inclusive the 14th Division suffered 1,797 and the 30th, 1,253 casualties; from the 9th to the 15th, the 21st Division suffered 1,398.

the Wancourt—Feuchy line, was approximately parallel to its front. Each of its three divisions in line was therefore to capture a section of this objective, which was on the average 3,500 yards distant, and the fourth was to pass through to take the Green Line, which represented in effect the Monchy spur and the village of Guémappe in the Cojeul valley.¹

Maps 3,
5.
Sketches
5, 9.

All the artillery attached to the corps was under the command of Br.-General J. G. Rotton. The Corps Heavy Artillery (Br.-General H. de T. Phillips) consisted of nine groups of eighteen 6-inch howitzer, five 8-inch howitzer, six 9.2-inch howitzer, and six 60-pdr. batteries; six 6-inch guns, one 9.2-inch gun (on railway mounting) and one 15-inch howitzer, a total of 117 howitzers and 43 guns.² With regard to tanks, No. 8 Company, C Battalion, was, as stated, to assist both the right of this corps and the left of the VII. against the Harp. Two pairs of tanks of No. 9 Company were to encircle Tilloy; two tanks were to sweep down the line of redoubts north of it; and two were to attack the railway triangle above the Scarpe valley. All available tanks of both companies were to assist the VI. Corps in the attack on the Wancourt—Feuchy line, one pair rolling it up from the north and the remainder—or the survivors among them—attacking Feuchy Chapel frontally.³

The 3rd Division (Major-General C. J. Deverell, headquarters, Russell Cave, near Arras Station) had a frontage of assembly of only half a mile, though its objective on the Wancourt—Feuchy line was nearly twice that breadth. Moreover, on its right front was the hinge of the enemy's withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line, where he had abandoned 500 yards of his front trench and had no real hold on the second, third and fourth. In the first instance, therefore, the division would attack with only a single battalion, which was to capture the fourth line. Another was to pass through it to take Devil's Wood and the Black Line, which here for the first time appears as an objective. Both would be provided by the 76th Brigade, which was

¹ VI. Corps Order No. 100 is given in Appendix 38.

² X., XXII., XXXII., XXXIV., XLVII., XLVIII., LXV., LXXII., LXXXI. Heavy Artillery Groups. Eight of the nine were linked in pairs to form double groups, the senior lieutenant-colonel being in tactical command of all batteries.

³ Owing to the overlapping of tank objectives it is not easy to explain clearly how the tanks were divided between the VI. and VII. Corps, but the scheme can readily be followed on Sketch 5.

left with one battalion in reserve, as the fourth was attached to the 9th Brigade. The 9th was to capture the Blue Line, which included the northern part of the Harp and the village of Tilloy lez Mofflaines. Finally, the 8th Brigade was to capture the Brown or Wancourt—Feuchy line. With the exception of one battalion, the 8th and 9th Brigades were accommodated until the evening of the 8th April in the Ronville caves and the cellars of Arras.¹

The divisional artillery (Br.-General J. Ollivant) had been reinforced by that of the 11th Division. Three brigades were to move forward in turn: one as soon as the Blue Line was taken, and each of the other two as soon as its predecessor was in action.

At the Army zero hour, 5.30 A.M., the attack of the 76th Brigade (Br.-General C. L. Porter) was launched, after a hurricane bombardment by Stokes mortars and under cover of both overhead and enfilade machine-gun barrages. The 1/Gordon Highlanders took the German fourth line and the 10/R. Welch Fusiliers Devil's Wood without serious difficulty, the enemy being overwhelmed by the bombardment and barrage. Without appreciable pause the 9th Brigade (Br.-General H. C. Potter) passed through at 7.30 A.M. Its right had furthest to go and was faced by the most difficult objective, the Harp. Here, therefore, there were two extra lifts in the creeping barrage, so as to bring it up parallel to the Blue Line, and two successive battalion objectives, the 4/Royal Fusiliers being set to take the String and the sunken road east of it, and the 2/Suffolk (attached from the 76th Brigade) to pass through it and capture the eastern side of the Harp. In the centre and on the left the 12/West Yorkshire and 13/King's were to go through the Blue Line.

All objectives were captured up to time except on the left, where the 13/King's were temporarily held up in front of a trench covering Tilloy and afterwards in the château wood and the quarry east of the village. This check would probably not have occurred but for a serious mishap to the tanks. Those of No. 8 Company operating against the Harp did valuable work, though only one reached its eastern side and all were bogged or hit. The ten tanks of No. 9 Company, operating further north, had to move under cover of darkness from the moat of the Citadel to their starting points east of Arras. Crossing the Crinchon valley, six broke through the surface and

¹ See Appendix 41.

stuck fast. There was further delay, because the lorries which were rushed up with railway sleepers to extricate the tanks were blocked in Achicourt by fallen masonry and smashed transport vehicles, the result of the previous evening's bombardment.¹ These tanks were dug out, but not in time to take part in the attack on the Blue Line, though two of them followed the infantry. Another, which had safely crossed the Crinchon valley, was bogged at the starting-point. At least one, however, rendered assistance in the capture of Tilloy.

When it came to the turn of the 8th Brigade (Br.-General H. G. Holmes) there was still some bickering going on in Tilloy, but it was decided not to interfere with the programme on that account. The 2/Royal Scots and 7/Shropshire L.I. passed through the 9th Brigade about noon, and the sight of their determined advance was too much for the nerves of such Germans as remained in Tilloy. As the British approached, scores of the enemy ran out into the open with their hands up, nearly one hundred surrendering here and 36 more being taken in the park. The long advance to the Wancourt—Feuchy line was carried out steadily, but when about six hundred yards short of it both battalions were driven to ground by enfilade machine-gun fire, chiefly from Feuchy Chapel. At 5.30 p.m. Major-General Deverell issued orders for a fresh attack. After a bombardment lasting until 6.45 two battalions of the 76th Brigade, the 1/Gordon Highlanders (still comparatively fresh) and the 8/King's Own (not yet seriously engaged) were to pass through the 8th Brigade and assault under a barrage.² Unfortunately the King's Own did not receive the orders until 6.35, and, as it had a mile and a quarter to cover, it arrived late. The Gordons advanced gallantly and made some progress, but again fire from Feuchy Chapel forced them back to the line of the Neuville—Feuchy Chapel road, where they dug in.

The 12th Division (Major-General A. B. Scott, headquarters, Wagnonlieu) had its right flank on the Cambrai road. No troops went into the battle in a fresher state or had benefited more from the protection of the caves, cellars, and tunnels. "Now it is possible", remarks one battalion diarist, "to get from the crypt of the Cathedral

¹ See p. 196.

² The 8th Brigade's own support battalion, the 8/East Yorkshire, had been absorbed, and the reserve, the 1/R. Scots Fusiliers, employed to fill a gap between the brigade's left and the 12th Division.

"to under the German wire without braving one shell in "the open."

Even the small proportion of the infantry manning the trenches during the preliminary period had suffered practically no loss in the large deep dug-outs which had been prepared. One battalion holding the front during four of the five days' bombardment did not suffer a single casualty. This state of affairs was in striking contrast to that of certain other offensives, in which the assailants were already jaded and depleted in numbers before they went "over the top".

The attack was to be carried out up to the Blue Line by the 37th Brigade on the right and the 36th on the left, and by the 35th against the Brown Line. The divisional artillery (Br.-General E. H. Willis) was reinforced by that of the 29th Division. The creeping barrage up to the Blue Line was to be formed by the 18-pdrs. of three of the four brigades, two 18-pdr. batteries of the fourth and the howitzer batteries of all four forming a standing barrage beyond. The remaining 18-pdr. battery was to fire a smoke barrage. When the Blue Line was reached two field artillery brigades were to move forward to the old British trenches east of Ronville, and with a third which remained stationary to cover the advance to the Brown Line. Meanwhile the fourth brigade was to move to a position of readiness south of the railway triangle in the area of the 15th Division. Its subsequent task would be to join with a brigade of the 15th Division in supporting the advance of the 37th Division to the Green Line.

The smoke barrage was of importance. A prominent feature of the zone of advance of the 12th Division and the 15th on its left was a spur known as Observation Ridge, running northward towards the Scarpe from the neighbourhood of Tilloy. Behind it Battery Valley afforded a series of such obvious battery positions that the enemy had risked the retention of the bulk of his field artillery there, in some cases only about 2,500 yards from the British lines. The significance of this formation of the ground and the enemy's employment of it was, on the one hand, that the British attack up to the Blue Line was dominated by Observation Ridge, but on the other, that if this line was reached a large proportion of the German field artillery was doomed.

Covered by a machine-gun barrage of 24 guns, the 37th Brigade (Br.-General A. B. E. Cator) with the 6/Queen's

on the right and 7/East Surrey on the left, and the 36th (Br.-General C. S. Owen), with the 11/Middlesex on the right and 7/R. Sussex on the left, advanced at Zero to the attack on the Black Line. Most of the opposition came from machine guns beyond the objective, the German infantry often remaining in the dug-outs and surrendering readily. Some of the prisoners spoke with awe of the machine-gun barrage. As might have been expected, the advance to the Blue Line was a very different task. On the front of the 37th Brigade the 6/Buffs and 6/R. West Kent were checked more than once, the egg-shaped work north of Tilloy being especially troublesome. It was taken largely with the rifle grenade, 105 prisoners being captured in it. Another work further north defied the 6/R. West Kent until the advance of the 35th Brigade began.¹ On the left the 9th and 8th Royal Fusiliers of the 36th Brigade were likewise delayed, but finally secured their objectives, again assisted by the advance of the 35th Brigade. In Feuchy Switch over two hundred prisoners were captured.

The 35th Brigade (Br.-General B. Vincent), moving from the cellars by the tunnel system, had reached the assembly trenches by 7.30 A.M. As it was due to advance from the Blue Line at 12.10 P.M. the brigadier did not venture to retain it in these trenches later than 10 A.M., though he knew fighting was still going on in front and that re-bombardment of Observation Ridge might be necessary. The brigade moved in artillery formation, led by the 7/Norfolk on the right and the 9/Essex on the left.

At 11 A.M. Br.-General Vincent learnt that resistance on Observation Ridge had not even yet been overcome, though according to the programme it should have been taken three hours earlier. He ordered the 7/Norfolk to push on, and here as on the front of the 3rd Division the appearance of the reserve brigade decided the issue, over ninety Germans surrendering to the Norfolks. The delay in capturing the ridge had, however, forced the 35th Brigade to deploy a quarter of a mile short of it, and from now onwards the troops were always struggling to catch

¹ The capture of this line of redoubts was powerfully aided by the heroic action of Sergeant H. Cator, 7/East Surrey. Though his own battalion's task was done, he went forward alone across the open, entered the trench, and worked his way along it, killing the detachment of a machine gun which was causing heavy loss. Then, still isolated, he co-operated with a bombing party to such effect that the Germans opposing it were cut off and captured, to the number of about one hundred. He was awarded the V.C.

up the time-table. The XVII. Brigade R.F.A., which, together with the LXII., was to move to a new position east of Ronville, was not permitted to leave its former station till 11 A.M. The LXIII. had to take its place in firing the Brown Line barrage from its original position, and was in its turn delayed in moving forward to take part in that from the Brown Line to the Green. The LXII. duly came into action east of Ronville at 12.10 P.M.

The 7/Norfolk, the only battalion of the 35th Brigade to go forward from the Blue Line up to time, had as its final objective, the "Maison Rouge" on the Cambrai road and some trenches north of it. It captured this without difficulty. Such Germans as were encountered put up their hands and "only wanted to know where "they ought to go".

Very different was the experience of the 9/Essex and 5/R. Berkshire. As they swept down the eastern slope of Observation Ridge, a dramatic scene of a type rare in this theatre of war was unfolded. The whole of Battery Valley was dotted with German artillery : some batteries already abandoned ; some, having got their teams up, making off as fast as they could ; but several others firing point-blank at the British Infantry at ranges of only a few hundred yards. Their blood up, the two battalions advanced by short rushes, covered by bursts of Lewis-gun fire. Two batteries were put out of action by two Vickers guns of the 35th Machine-Gun Company. Pushing on resolutely, the Essex took nine guns and the R. Berkshire no less than 22, as well as a number of prisoners. To add to the triumph, the men of the latter battalion, under the direction of the artillery liaison officer, got a couple of the captured guns into action, replacing broken breech blocks from guns otherwise damaged, and shelled Germans seen on the high ground behind the Brown Line.

Unfortunately, however, the 7/Suffolk and 9/Essex were unable to advance from the Maison Rouge line till 1.35 P.M., instead of 12.55, and thus lost the barrage. This was indeed a disaster, since on the one hand the wire of the Wancourt—Feuchy line was uncut, and on the other the Germans, with the exception of a few machine-gun detachments, had fled, and with adequate artillery support the troops themselves could probably have cut the wire. One company of 9/Essex, indeed, did so, and accomplished brilliant work in capturing Chapel work, the redoubt round Feuchy Chapel ; but Church work to

the south-east held out and the wire of the trench line was never pierced. Worse still, the Germans were now trickling back in small parties, and Br.-General Vincent could already see some hundreds of their heads along the first Wancourt—Feuchy trench. Once more this trench had held up the advance.

About 6.15 P.M. the 112th Brigade of the 37th Division (Major-General H. B. Williams, headquarters, St. Sauveur Caves) came up out of Battery Valley, behind the 35th Brigade. The 37th was, it will be recalled, the division destined to capture Guémappe and Monchy.

Marching in three columns, it had reached three control posts on the western outskirts of Arras at 8.30 A.M. that morning. At 9.15 A.M. Major-General Williams had received verbal orders from VI. Corps headquarters to advance by routes previously arranged—one round the northern fringe of Arras and two through the town—to assembly positions in the British trenches. A “pack echelon first-line transport” had been organized and remained at the control posts in readiness to move at an hour’s notice.¹

At 12 noon, the 112th and 111th Brigades were ordered up to the Black Line, the 63rd standing fast for the moment. Next, at 1.40 P.M., the 112th Brigade was ordered to continue the advance and halt under cover of Observation Ridge. Finally, at 3 P.M. Major-General Williams issued orders for the 112th Brigade to go forward in rear of the 12th Division, the 111th to go forward in rear of the 15th, and the 63rd to follow the 111th to Battery Valley.

Br.-General R. C. Maclachlan, commanding the 112th Brigade, learnt from Br.-General Vincent that the western redoubt at Feuchy Chapel had been taken, but did not gather that the wire of the rest of the line was uncut.² The 6/Bedfordshire and 8/East Lancashire of his brigade advanced with the intention of forcing a way through, but, coming under heavy fire and perceiving the true state of affairs, halted on the road through Feuchy Chapel and dug in. The brigade’s right then lay just north of Airy Corner and its left 300 yards north of Feuchy Chapel.

The 111th Brigade (Br.-General C. W. Compton), which had the most vital objective in the Green Line,

¹ Administrative instructions for this division are given in Appendix 85.

² This statement is taken from his report, but Br.-General Vincent does not consider that he could have been in doubt as to the state of the wire. Br.-General Maclachlan was subsequently killed in action.

the village of Monchy, also emerged from Battery Valley, on the left of the 112th. This brigade had received a report that the Wancourt—Feuchy trenches had been captured, but was disillusioned on coming under heavy machine-gun fire from them at 6 P.M. It was not till 6.37 P.M. that the divisional commander, Major-General Williams, was informed by VI. Corps headquarters that the situation on the fronts of the 8rd and 12th Divisions was not clear but that the 15th had captured the Brown Line, and that his division was therefore to pass through the 15th. He issued orders to this effect at 6.55 P.M.; but by then both the 112th and 111th Brigades were committed to the advance, the 112th on the frontage described, the 111th on one of a thousand yards on its left—that is, well within the 12th Division's area—and darkness was fast approaching.¹

The enemy was no longer "on the run", and an opportunity had passed. It might have been seized but for the delays in the movements of the field artillery and false reports which reached it that the whole objective had been taken. On hearing this news the battery commanders of the LXIII. Brigade R.F.A., which had halted south of the railway triangle, had ridden on into Battery Valley to find new positions. The brigade commander, Lieut.-Colonel L. J. Hext, could see with his own eyes from Observation Ridge that at all events on the 12th Division's left the Wancourt—Feuchy line was not taken.² He thereupon hurried over to the guns and brought them into action where they were; but it was now too late, as the infantry advance had been abandoned. In any case visibility was very bad during the late afternoon, and at times reduced by snow showers to twenty yards.

The attack of the 12th Division had none the less been a fine feat, and on the 35th Brigade in particular the exhilaration of sweeping through the enemy's batteries had left an indelible impression.

The 15th Division (Major-General F. W. N. McCracken, headquarters, Duisans) was disposed similarly to the 12th, with two brigades in line to capture the first two objectives

¹ The orders are not given, and it is not clear whether more than one brigade—the 68rd—was directed to pass through the 15th Division, but in any case there would have been no time to put either of the other two into the gap.

² One battery of the LXII. Brigade, "C", had made a second move, and after being checked by mud in the old front line and fallen trees on the Cambrai road had come into action soon after 5 P.M. just below the crest of Observation Ridge.

and the third to pass through to attack the Wancourt—Feuchy system. In this case, however, there was to be no “leap-frogging” of battalions on the Black Line. Like that of the 12th Division, the infantry had been well protected, each of the first-line brigades having kept two battalions, and the reserve brigade all four, in the Arras cellars during the five days’ bombardment.

The artillery of the 33rd Division was attached to that of the 15th, which was commanded by Br.-General E. B. Macnaghten. During the halt of four hours which was to take place on the Blue Line all the 18-pdr. and two of the 4·5-inch howitzer batteries were to move up by sections to positions between Blangy and the Faubourg St. Sauveur.

Only two tanks had been allotted to the sector of the 15th Division. Their first objective was the railway triangle, which they were to attack from the rear. This triangle, at the junction of the Arras—Lille and Arras—Valenciennes railways, constituted the most striking feature of this part of the front, and was a serious obstacle. On its southern side the line ran in a cutting, but the lines forming the other two sides were on high embankments which completely dominated the ground between the triangle and the Scarpe. The second objective of the tanks was the Wancourt—Feuchy line, which they were to roll up from the northern end.

The advance of the 44th Brigade (Br.-General F. J. Marshall) and the 45th (Br.-General W. H. L. Allgood) to the Black Line, covered by a barrage of 22 machine guns, was effected quite smoothly except on the extreme left. The 8th/10th Gordon Highlanders and 9/Black Watch of the 44th and the 7/R. Scots Fusiliers and 11/Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders of the 45th all reached it without difficulty. Two companies of the 13/Royal Scots had been assigned as objective that part of Blangy which lay in the German lines. They had hard fighting, having to bring up Stokes mortars before they could beat down the opposition, and did not clear the ruins till 8.45 A.M. This delay, however, did not prejudice the general progress, as the operation was a separate one and the battalion had not to go beyond the Blue Line, east of which sheets of water and marshy ground narrowed the frontage.

Both brigades were held up by the railway triangle, and at 11.30 A.M. Major-General McCracken ordered the barrage back to the eastern side of it and thence along the

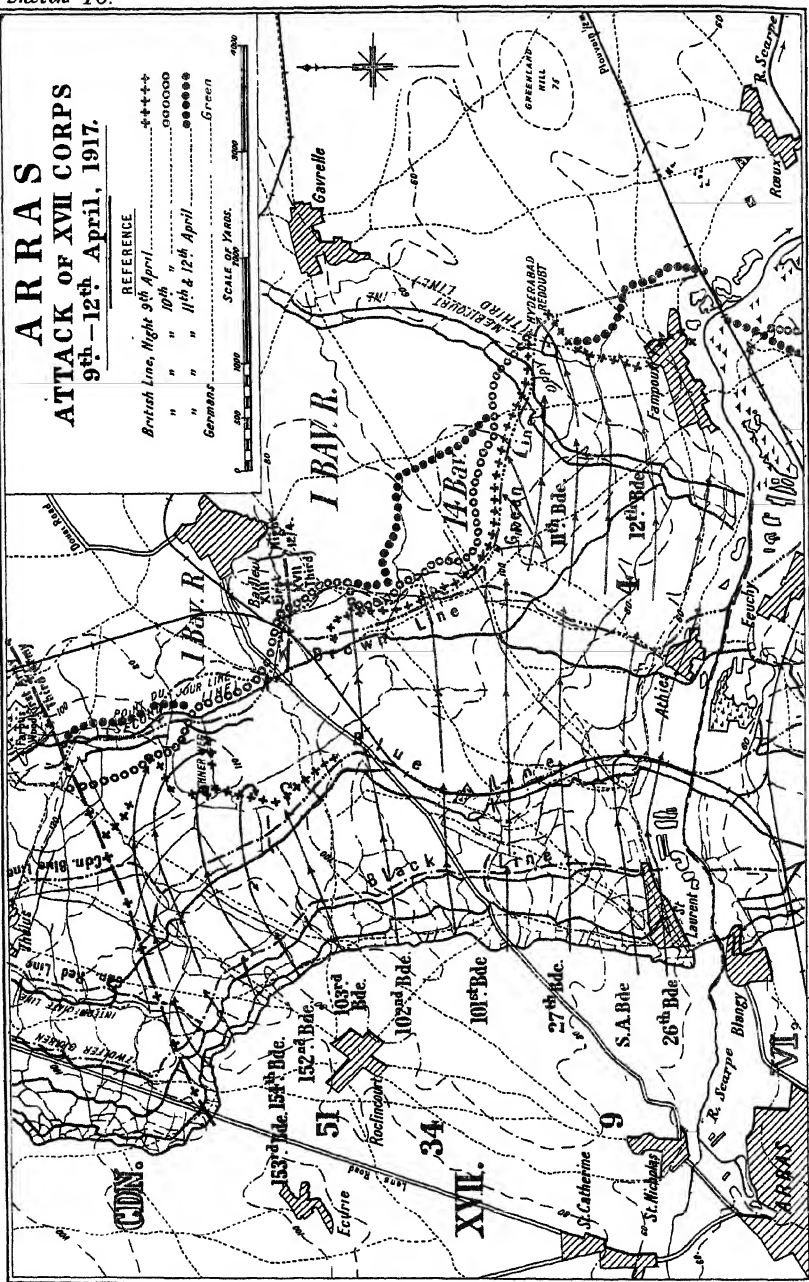
embankment to the river. Aided by a tank, which passed south of the railway and engaged the machine guns in the triangle, the infantry once more advanced, and about 12.30 P.M. captured the whole of the second objective.¹

The 46th Brigade (Br.-General E. A. Fagan) was to have advanced from the Blue Line at 12.50 P.M., and two companies of the 12/Highland L.I., which did not learn in time that there had been a postponement until 2 P.M., had an extraordinary experience. They pushed forward at the original hour; then, realizing that the British barrage would now come down in their rear and that there was no time to get behind its initial line, took what cover they could find and waited. The barrage having passed over them apparently without causing serious loss, they sprang up and followed upon its skirts—a fine example of cool courage. As this battalion with the 10/Scottish Rifles and 7th/8th K.O.S.B. came down the slope into Battery Valley, the scenes that occurred on the 12th Division's front were re-enacted. Several German batteries opened fire, two at 800 yards' range. They caused heavy loss, but their detachments were quickly shot down and 36 guns were captured.

In accordance with previous arrangement, Feuchy received special treatment; a bombardment by 6-inch howitzers was concentrated upon it, after which the village was cleared by the 7/K.O.S.B. and two companies of the 10/Scottish Rifles. The Northamptonshire Yeomanry, VI. Corps cavalry, passed through the infantry half a mile east of the village at 5 p.m., meeting with no opposition till it reached the cross-roads south of the Scarpe at Fampoux. It then drove off some snipers, captured six guns, made good the road and railway bridges, and sent patrols into Fampoux, where it established touch with the 4th Division.

Then came the final triumph of the 15th Division: the Brown Line was entered on the left soon after 4 P.M. and captured along its whole length by about 5.30. Valuable aid was given by a single tank which—almost miraculously if we reckon its chances by the average of the tank casualties—reached this position, worked down it, and put at least two machine guns out of action. The few prisoners taken here brought the day's total to over five hundred.

¹ The diary of the 6th/7th R. Scots Fusiliers states that this battalion did not receive news of the re-bombardment in time to attack the triangle at 12.5, when the barrage lifted, but took its objective with the aid of Stokes mortars.



The 63rd Brigade (Br.-General E. L. Challenor) of the 37th Division reached Battery Valley at 6 P.M. In the original plan this brigade had a comparatively subsidiary rôle. It was to have followed the 111th and after the capture of Monchy le Preux to have covered its flank as far as the Scarpe; but, as has been explained, the 111th was now committed to the advance on the front of the 12th Division and held up by uncut wire. It was a grave misfortune that the task of passing through the gap should have fallen upon the 63rd Brigade and that the 111th, which was marching ahead of it, could not have been stopped from closing up behind the 12th Division and diverted into the breach made by the 15th. Had this been effected, or had the 46th Brigade—as suggested by Major-General McCracken—been allowed to go on, a full hour would have been gained and Monchy would probably have been captured that night. It is important to note in this regard that throughout the evening the 37th Division Signal Company was unable to locate the 111th Brigade headquarters.

At 7.35 P.M. Br.-General Challenor ordered the 8/Somerset L.I. and 8/Lincolnshire to seize Orange Hill beyond the Brown Line,¹ and if the 111th Brigade were advancing on Monchy to occupy Lone Copse valley. The movement was accomplished without opposition, but slowly, as darkness quickly fell, and no more could be done that night.

The average advance made by the VI. Corps was over two miles. At Orange Hill it was little short of three. Unfortunately, on the front of only one of the three divisions had the Brown Line been captured. The opposition was not strong in numbers or, apparently, in resolution, but after the first attack of the right and centre divisions had broken down and the chance had been missed of putting the nearest available troops into the gap made by the left, the April day was not long enough to permit adequate preparation for a fresh operation. During the night only the bomb could be used, and it was not a weapon which could produce quick results.

ATTACK OF THE XVII. CORPS

The XVII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir Charles Fergusson, Bt., headquarters, Aubigny, 8 miles north-west of Arras) was to attack with its right on the Scarpe and its left

¹ Actually, by this time there were patrols of the 15th Division on Orange Hill.

directed on the Commandant's House, south-west of Farbus Wood. Its objective was the village of Fampoux in the Scarpe valley and the southern end of Vimy Ridge. As stated in the previous chapter, the continuation north of the Scarpe of the Wancourt—Feuchy line, which may here be described as the Oppy—Méricourt line,¹ curved back, and except in front of Fampoux on the toe of Vimy Ridge was somewhat distant to be included in the objective of a single day.²

Another system, the Point du Jour line, along the reverse slope of Vimy Ridge, had been intercalated, having been dug during the winter. This constituted the final objective, the Brown Line, of the three first-line divisions of the XVII. Corps, the 9th, 34th, and 51st. The 4th Division, in reserve, was to exploit the success by passing through the 9th, breaching the Oppy—Méricourt line on a front of 2,500 yards immediately north of the Scarpe, and capturing Fampoux. Its objective was the Green Line. Elsewhere on the corps front this objective marked only local exploitation, nowhere more than four hundred yards beyond the Brown Line, and to be carried out by the first-line divisions.

The Corps Heavy Artillery (Br.-General N. G. Barron), distributed under twelve heavy group headquarters, consisted of twenty-three 6-inch howitzer, eight 8-inch howitzer, eight and a half 9.2-inch howitzer, four 12-inch howitzer, one 15-inch howitzer, ten 60-pdr., and two 6-inch gun batteries, and one battery of one 9.2-inch and one 12-inch gun. One 12-inch howitzer was Belgian.³ The whole of

¹ It is described in the Despatches as the Oppy—Méricourt—Vendin line. Pont à Vendin and Vendin le Viel are on the Canal de la Haute Deule $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles north-east of Lens.

² In mid-March, however, when it was not certain how far the German retirement would affect the front of the VII. Corps, General Allenby had asked Lieut.-General Fergusson to study the possibilities of using two reserve divisions instead of the one which had been allotted to him. The corps commander had then stated that in this case he would try to breach the Oppy—Méricourt line at least as far north as Gavrelle. As, however, the advance of the Canadian Corps was to be so limited, he would have a long gap to cover on his left flank, and the only troops available to do this would be the three divisions which had made the original attack. With the wisdom which comes after the event we can now see that an extra division could have been well employed by the XVII. Corps, and that if the front of attack of the VII. had been shortened in consequence, that would not have mattered.

³ VII., XII., XVI., XXIX., XXXIII., XLIX., LV., LVI., LXVIII., LXXVIII., LXXX., LXXXIII. The LVI. Heavy Artillery Group headquarters had no batteries attached to it; it formed the "H.Q. Trench Groups" and had the XXXIII. and LXXVIII. as sub-groups under its orders. Of the 12-inch howitzer batteries two had two pieces each and two (one of which was the Belgian) one piece.

the corps artillery was under the command of Br.-General C. R. Buckle. Maps 3, 6. Sketch 10.

There were only eight tanks (No. 7 Company, C Battalion) available for attachment to this corps. Four of these were to support the 9th Division against the village of St. Laurent—Blangy, after which two were to work up the Blue Line, or second objective, while the other two went forward to attack Athies on the Brown. The other four were to support the 34th Division against the Bois de la Maison Blanche on the Blue Line, then to work down the valley south of the wood, and finally to join the two which were attacking Athies. The 51st Division was without tank support.¹

The frontage of the 9th Division (Major-General H. T. Lukin, headquarters, Etrun) was greater than that of the divisions immediately south of the Scarpe, and it was to attack with all three brigades in line. It also had exceptionally strong artillery support, the XXIX. and XXXII. Brigades of the 4th Division and the XIV., XXIII., and LII. Army Brigades, to cover both its own and the subsequent attack of the 4th Division. A notable feature of the artillery scheme was that the 18-pdrs. fired high-explosive, with one round in four smoke shell, in the creeping barrages. This was in accordance with the theory of the C.R.A., Br.-General H. H. Tudor, to which he had converted his divisional commander, that a barrage of high-explosive, provided that there were guns enough to make it reasonably thick, gave advancing infantry more protection and confidence than one of shrapnel. In this case, too, the barrage had to advance an unusually long distance, over open country with several shallow valleys, so that shrapnel would have been ineffective at certain periods owing to wrong estimation of angles of sight. Shrapnel was used only for the protective barrages put down beyond the successive objectives and for the searching and sweeping barrages fired during the pause upon them.²

The division had been in this neighbourhood since early December—at first on a frontage of four miles astride the Scarpe—had done all its own work and much of that of other divisions on tramways, command posts, emplacements

¹ XVII. Corps Order No. 27 is given in Appendix 32.

² As stated on p. 184, it had been laid down by the Third Army that the creeping barrages should consist of 50 per cent. shrapnel and 50 per cent. high-explosive. It appears that the artillery orders of the 9th Division were not submitted to higher authority in detail for fear that a categorical order to conform to this instruction would be the result.

and cable trenches; consequently, it knew the ground thoroughly.

The advance of the 26th Brigade (Br.-General J. Kennedy) up to the Black Line was completely successful and in accordance with the programme. The 7/Seaforth Highlanders on the right had some fighting in St. Laurent, but the 8/Black Watch on the left met with little resistance. For the attack on the Blue Line two companies of the 10/Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders moved up to support the two of the Black Watch, which went through to this objective, while the Seaforth advanced with one company in front and one in second line; that is, the brigade attacked on a front of three companies with the same number in support. Here more resistance was encountered; the advance was temporarily held up; and the Black Watch in particular suffered heavily before forcing a way in at either end of the objective and bombing inwards till the two parties joined hands. The delay had not been long enough to affect the time-table; indeed, there was ample time for a redistribution of the troops. The 10/Argyll, which was to have carried out the advance to the Brown Line, was weak originally and had suffered fairly heavy loss. The 5/Cameron Highlanders was therefore brought up on its left. Learning that the advance of the 15th Division had been at least temporarily checked at the railway triangle, Major-General Lukin had a smoke barrage put down on the exposed flank and obtained leave from Lieut.-General Fergusson to call upon the troops of the 4th Division to support the advance if necessary. All the tanks of No. 7 Company had either been bogged or hit, so that no further support was forthcoming from them.

The attack was a complete success. Athies, heavily bombarded but still standing, collapsed and dissolved into powder before the eyes of the advancing infantry. The wire of the Point du Jour line was little damaged, but the troops forced their way through. Crowds of prisoners, eager only to reach safety, were sent back without escort.

On the front of the South African Brigade (Br.-General F. S. Dawson) the 3rd and 4th South African Infantry both suffered heavy loss from machine-gun fire, but met with little opposition at close quarters either at the first or at the second objective. In front of the latter there was a good deal of uncut wire, but the men trampled their way through it. The 1st and 2nd South African Infantry had very little resistance to deal with; otherwise, good troops

as they were, they could not have entered the Point du Jour trenches by the lanes the enemy had left in the wire. As they approached it, indeed, they saw men running away without arms or equipment, and directly the barrage slackened small parties came in and surrendered. One battalion had 84, the other 88 casualties.

The dispositions of the 27th Brigade (Br.-General F. A. Maxwell) differed from those of the other two. In this case two battalions, the 12/Royal Scots and 6/K.O.S.B., were to capture the Black Line, when the 9/Scottish Rifles and 11/Royal Scots were to go through them to take the Blue. As to which battalions were to carry out the advance to the Brown, Br.-General Maxwell, characteristically, left this for decision until the Blue had been taken. Actually he sent on the 9/Scottish Rifles and 11/Royal Scots, which had not suffered heavily.¹ In his own words, the advance was "a procession, and happily so; for the heavy wire protecting the Brown Line was untouched".

The 9th Division had thus taken all its objectives. By 8 p.m. 51 officers and 2,047 other ranks had passed through the prisoner-of-war "cages" and more were coming in. Moreover, the troops had been eager to go on and take the objectives in the Oppy—Méricourt line and at Fampoux. There is little doubt that they could have done so; indeed, the task was more difficult for the 4th Division than it would have been for the 9th because of the delay occasioned by moving a fresh division through. Both Br.-Generals Kennedy and Maxwell in their reports condemned the protective barrage beyond the Brown Line; the latter, indeed, stated that he had been strongly tempted to push his men straight through it.

The 4th Division (Major-General the Hon. W. Lambton, headquarters, Etrun) had been quartered round Maroeuil, 3½ miles north-west of Arras. In the early hours of the 9th it moved to assembly areas north of Arras about St. Nicholas and Ste. Catherine, which the leading brigades quitted at approximately 9.30 and 10 a.m. The troops were wet and chilled by early showers, but the sight of columns of prisoners passing through and a hot meal served in the assembly area put them in very good heart. The 12th Brigade on the right and the 11th on the left reached the captured Blue Line at noon.² There was no question

¹ The 9/Scottish Rifles had 69 casualties. For an advance of a mile and a half this was indeed extraordinarily good fortune.

² 12th Brigade Order No. 21 is given in Appendix 43.

of masking the field artillery, and only one gun had to be stopped firing, but some batteries at the end of their task were shooting at ranges of nearly 7,000 yards. The barrage, high-explosive with "non-delay-action" fuzes, appeared regular, though the infantry complained that a gun or two fired short. The barrage crept beyond the Oppy—Méricourt line at the rate of 100 yards in two minutes, then fired on selected points only, lifting when the infantry was within four to five hundred yards of it. Two 6-inch howitzer batteries of the LXXVIII Heavy Artillery Group were in action in new positions near St. Nicholas before the 4th Division left the Brown Line.¹

The 12th Brigade, whose commander, Br.-General A. Carton de Wiart, had been slightly wounded on the 8th but had remained at duty, was somewhat delayed in its advance behind the 9th Division and suffered loss from artillery fire. It passed through at 3.15 P.M. behind the new barrage, the 1/King's Own on the right, the 2/Lancashire Fusiliers in the centre, and the 2/Essex on the left, each with three machine guns and two or three Stokes mortars. On approaching the Oppy—Méricourt line it was met by some wild rifle fire, but as the British infantry came on the Germans for the most part either ran forward to surrender or ran back to escape. Many of the latter were shot down. In this stage of the advance the Lancashire Fusiliers had only five casualties. At 4.40 P.M. the 2/Duke of Wellington's passed through the King's Own to attack Fampoux, behind a special howitzer barrage moving at the rate of 100 yards in four minutes, the other two battalions going straight on to their Green Line objectives. In the village—where the last round fired by the 15-inch howitzer had exploded a big ammunition dump—there was some fighting as the eastern houses were reached. Fampoux was taken, but progress to the Green Line five hundred yards beyond was found impossible in face of the machine-gun fire which burst out from the railway embankment to the south-east. The other two battalions were similarly checked and dug in about the line of the Fampoux—Gavrelle road.

¹ Two 60-pdr. batteries of the LXVIII. H.A.G. moved to positions near St. Nicholas, but at what hour is not stated. Two 60-pdr. batteries of the XXIX. H.A.G., behind the 51st Division were ordered to move at 2 P.M. Some 6-inch howitzers, out of range, parked in readiness for a move. The 6-inch howitzers, with a range of 10,000 yards, were the only pieces out of range. The 60-pdrs. had a range of 15,000 yards, but, as weapons of opportunity, were moved forward to engage distant targets and above all to break up counter-attacks.

The brigade had captured about 230 prisoners and 24 guns, ten of them heavy howitzers, its own casualty list being 147.

Owing to the great distance which it had to cover, the 11th Brigade (Br.-General R. A. Berners) had brigaded under the command of a specially selected officer a company from each battalion, to act as a carrying-party. The 1/Somerset L.I. and 1/Hampshire captured their section of the Oppy—Méricourt line, the men in some cases passing through the enemy's own gaps, in others climbing over while their comrades shot down any German who showed his head. There was not much opposition, however, most of the enemy in the front line surrendering, while those in the support line ran away. The 1/Rifle Brigade then passed through the Somersets to attack the big triangular work known as Hyderabad Redoubt. Here again the wire was uncut, and there were only two lanes on the western side. One platoon drop-kicked a football into the middle of the redoubt and, following it up with a rush, was quickly in possession of the objective. A general officer was captured in the sunken Fampoux—Gavrelle road; he had arranged that his car should remain close at hand, but had been deserted by his chauffeur. On the left the 1/East Lancashire, which had not to cross the Oppy—Méricourt trenches but only to form a flank to the Douai road, captured a battery in action at a range of 120 yards and reached the Green Line. The casualties of the four battalions amounted to 302. Just before the fall of darkness considerable numbers of the enemy were seen moving up in artillery formation, but the counter-attack was never seriously pressed.

This marked the longest advance made that day and the longest made in a single day by any belligerent on the Western Front since trench warfare had set in; it was a distance of $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles.

The 34th Division (Major-General C. L. Nicholson, headquarters on the Lille road east of Maroeuil) was attacking with all three brigades in line. Its final objective was the Point du Jour line, with a Green Line which was only from 100 to 350 yards beyond it. The divisional artillery (Br.-General W. H. K. Rettie) had been reinforced by the 17th Division Artillery and the LXXXVI. and CCCXI. (Army) Brigades. As, however, the 17th Division formed part of the Cavalry Corps, it was foreseen that it might require its artillery on the first day, in which case the batteries would probably be withdrawn about 10.30 A.M.,

while the protective barrage in front of the Blue Line was being fired. If so, a battery from each of the divisions on its flanks was to assist the 34th in the remaining part of the programme and its own artillery scheme was to be modified by putting the 18-pdrs. detailed to the standing barrage into the "creeper".

The 101st Brigade (Br.-General R. C. Gore) attacked with the 16/Royal Scots on the right and the 11/Suffolk on the left. These two battalions, like the leading battalions in the other two brigades, were to take the first two objectives, the Black and the Blue Lines. On the front of the right and centre brigades the latter line was the Arras—Lille railway, here for the most part in a cutting.

As usual, there was little difficulty in capturing the first objective, but confusion resulted from the fact that it was not recognised and was overrun, and that the 15/Royal Scots then closed up on the leaders and to some extent intermingled with them. There was no time to reorganize, so the troops moved forward to the Blue Line without doing so. The railway cutting was taken, but by the time the advance to the Brown Line was due to begin the 15/Royal Scots had become so intermingled with the first-line battalions that it could collect only about 130 men, and they went forward in a single extended line. This little force none the less captured its objective, a party of fifty Germans coming out to meet it carrying a white flag and holding up their hands. The 10/Lincolnshire, on the left, experienced rather more trouble. The wire in front of the front trench was ten feet deep, and the men had to cut lanes in it with wire-cutters and wire-breakers. While they were thus engaged, the barrage had gone far ahead, but so slight was the opposition that the battalion was able to get through and advance to the track leading north-west from the Point du Jour. In the position there was every sign of hasty flight. Dug-out fires were alight; cooked food stood on tables; parcels from home were unopened. There was no artillery or infantry fire, and the slope in front was empty. It is quite possible that the brigade could have taken Gavrelle that evening; for the Oppy—Méricourt line at this point appeared to be without a garrison.

In the centre the attack of the 102nd (Tyneside Scottish) Brigade (Br.-General T. P. B. Ternan) was also successful. The enemy was for the most part eager to surrender, and prisoners declared that the machine-gun

barrages had been so fierce and accurate that they had been afraid to put their heads above the parapets. It was noticed, too, that many Germans had been killed by bullets. The 21st and 22nd Northumberland Fusiliers captured the Blue Line up to time. The advance was continued with the 20/Northumberland Fusiliers on the right and the 23/Northumberland Fusiliers on the left. Owing to the failure of the 103rd Brigade the latter battalion had its left in the air and, like the 10/Lincolnshire, lost the barrage while cutting lanes in the wire of the front trench. It had a stiff fight for the support line, and only carried it by advancing by short rushes and with a loss of 165. Finally, the two battalions were compelled to dig in a little short of the Green Line.

The 103rd Brigade (Br.-General H. E. Trevor) captured the first objective easily, taking a large number of prisoners in the dug-outs. But when the 24th and 25th Northumberland Fusiliers went forward against the second objective they came under heavy fire from it, and the latter battalion was disorganized by troops of the 51st Division first crossing its front and then falling back through it. The confusion was increased by serious losses in officers. At 11 A.M. the situation was obscure to Br.-General Trevor, but it appeared that the right third only of the objective had been taken. Attacks up the communication trenches, in which the support battalions took part, were then organized and finally proved successful; but valuable time had been lost.¹

At 12.30 P.M. Br.-General Trevor got into touch with Lieut.-Colonel M. E. Richardson, commanding the 26/Northumberland Fusiliers, and told him that the advance to the Brown Line must be carried out with whatever troops were in hand. The attack started about 1.40 P.M., but was held up almost at once by machine-gun fire from the left flank. It was not until the evening that Major-General Nicholson knew definitely what had happened: that his right brigade was wholly and his centre virtually upon the final objective, but that his left had not progressed beyond the Blue Line. At 9.45 P.M. he ordered the 103rd Brigade to capture its portion of the Brown Line without fail before morning, putting the 21/Northumberland

¹ Private T. Bryan, 25/Northumberland Fusiliers, was awarded the V.C. for a deed of bravery which largely contributed to the capture of this objective. Though wounded, he went forward alone up a communication trench (probably the "Zehner Weg") to attack a machine-gun which was holding up the advance, and put it out of action.

Fusiliers at Br.-General Trevor's disposal and arranging for the co-operation of the 51st Division.

The left formation of the XVII. Corps and of the Third Army, the 51st Division (Major-General G. M. Harper, headquarters, Maroeuil) had a task more than ordinarily complicated. The Canadian Corps on its left had an extra, intermediate, objective—the Red Line, which here followed a trench known as the “Zwischen-Stellung”—owing to the fact that the German front curved westward round the old “Labyrinth”, of notorious memory since the days of the French operations against Vimy Ridge. The Canadian Blue Line was also in advance of that of the XVII. Corps, so that the left of the 51st Division would have, by a separate operation, to swing up in order to link with it. On the right of the 51st, too, there was a local objective, the New Black Line, the capture of which necessitated a swing forward on this flank. A third complication was that the division's objectives included a narrow section of the Labyrinth salient mentioned above. Here a single company of the left battalion was to attack due northwards to cover the flank.

As previously stated, there were no tanks supporting this division. The divisional artillery (Br.-General L. C. L. Oldfield) had been reinforced by the XXXIV., LXXXIV., and CCCXV. (Army) Brigades.

The attack was to be carried up to the Brown Line by two brigades, each with a battalion from the third attached. The third brigade, less these two battalions, was to capture the Green Line, which on this front represented only exploitation to a maximum depth of five hundred yards on a front of double that distance. These dispositions were not on the lines laid down by the corps commander, who had decided that the 9th, 34th and 51st Divisions should each attack with three brigades in line, with a view to the maintenance of one command over the maximum depth of the advance in each sub-sector. It was, however, unusual to deprive divisional commanders of liberty of action within their own sectors, and he therefore gave his assent to Major-General Harper's scheme, including the splitting-up of the brigades.

The 152nd Brigade (Br.-General H. P. Burn) attacked with the 6/Gordon Highlanders on the right and the 6/Seaforth Highlanders on the left. The Black Line was, as elsewhere, captured, but the Seaforths had a hard fight and both battalions suffered many casualties. A talkative

prisoner, who had been head waiter in a hotel in the West End of London, told his captors that he knew of no troops behind the Blue Line, and that if they took this all would be easy.

He was not a true prophet, though he well might have been. Between the New Black and Blue Lines the 8/Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders and the 5/Seaforth Highlanders were checked by machine-gun fire and lost the barrage, whereupon the commander of the first wave of the Argyll, by an error of judgement, took his men back to the New Black Line. Delay on the Blue Line, where resistance was not stifled until 2.15 P.M., seriously prejudiced the chances of the final advance. Eventually both battalions were held up in an intermediate trench, rather less than half-way from the Blue Line to the Brown.

On the front of the 154th Brigade (Br.-General J. G. H. Hamilton) the 9/Royal Scots and 4/Seaforth Highlanders took the Black Line without serious opposition. The detached company of the Seaforths, issuing from an old mine-shaft, secured its objective, though only after a ferocious struggle in the Labyrinth with a party of fifty Germans who fought to the last; but in all nearly three hundred prisoners were captured during this stage. The advance of the 7/Argyll & Sutherland and 4/Gordon Highlanders to the Blue Line was also successful, but the former battalion was held up short of its objective and had to employ the companies detailed for the next step to assist in its capture.

The advance to the Brown Line was a chapter of accidents. Both battalions, probably owing to all their more experienced officers having become casualties, lost direction and swung right. The Argyll veered across the front of the 152nd Brigade—which, as we have seen, was held up—crossed two communication trenches, and settled down in a third, which it assumed to be its objective. There its companies remained all night, still apparently believing they were in the Point du Jour line. The Gordons made a similar but lesser swerve. Their left platoon, however, keeping touch with the Canadians, went on, entered the Point du Jour line, and then, finding its right in the air, came out again.

An incident unknown at the time except to the handful of men concerned shows that it was entirely this change of direction and failure of local leadership which caused the break-down of the attack on the final objective. Lieutenant

MacNaughton, in command of one of the two sub-sections of the 153rd Machine-Gun Company attached to the 154th Brigade, led his little party up into the Point du Jour line and reached the support trench. It was a fine feat to have carried the two guns, the tripods, and the belt-boxes over that heavy, uphill ground, and to have gone on despite the failure of the infantry. He set up his guns, established touch with the Canadian patrols in Farbus Wood, and walked several hundred yards south down the trench, finding not a soul in it. Being shelled by the British artillery, he withdrew his guns to the front trench. There he remained all night. At 6 A.M. next morning he discovered that on his right the Germans had returned in force and that one party had come up the trench to a point only about thirty yards distant from his guns. He contrived to withdraw them about seven hundred yards, and obtained touch with the left of the 4/Gordon Highlanders.

Though it had failed to reach its final objective, the 51st Division had taken over 700 prisoners, two field guns, and 29 machine guns.

THE DAY'S RESULTS

Up to the evening the Third Army reported the capture of 5,600 prisoners and 36 guns. Actually, more prisoners were coming in and many more guns had been captured. The casualties were certainly less than half the number inflicted upon the enemy.¹

The Cavalry Corps had not been engaged. South of the Scarpe, where it had been intended to put the cavalry through, success had not, unfortunately, been as great as north of the river, only the 15th Division having captured the Wancourt—Feuchy line, and that at a late hour. By the afternoon the 3rd Cavalry Division had its head north of Tilloy lez Mofflaines and its tail on the northern outskirts of Arras, while the 2nd Cavalry Division stretched from south of Tilloy to the Crinchon valley. Both divisions were later on ordered to withdraw to bivouacs west and south-west of Arras.

The 1st Cavalry Division was quartered about Frévin—Capelle, 6½ miles north-west of Arras, in G.H.Q. reserve.

¹ Owing to differences in methods of reporting it would be difficult to give more than a rough estimate of the British casualties on 9th April. Those from the 9th to the 11th are given at the end of the following Chapter.

Early in the afternoon the Commander-in-Chief saw General Allenby and agreed to his request that a brigade should be sent forward on the north bank of the Scarpe towards Plouvain. At 4.15 P.M. the division was warned that a brigade should be prepared to move, and detailed the 1st ; but no instructions for the move to take place were received that day. The 9th Cavalry Brigade was put at the disposal of the First Army.

Experienced officers of the 4th and 9th Divisions believed that cavalry would have had a good opening, had it been sufficiently close at hand. Br.-General Carton de Wiart, commanding the 12th Brigade, himself a cavalryman, told a cavalry liaison officer that he was convinced the cavalry could get through, and, learning that the nearest brigade was too far back but would be up next day, added, "Tomorrow will be too late". Lieut.-Colonel W. D. Croft, commanding the 11/Royal Scots (9th Division), had previously telephoned to his brigadier in exactly the same sense.¹ It is at least certain that only here and on the front of the 34th Division could cavalry have been effectively employed on that day. In place of the ambitious scheme of using cavalry in masses, by divisions, as was projected south of the Scarpe, the best opportunity seems to have been for squadrons acting independently. If well handled, they might have gained a great deal of ground, which could have been taken over by the infantry after dark.

From an early hour—except on the VII. Corps front, where the attack started late—and all through the night the engineers and pioneers were hard at work. On the front of the 30th Division, the Mercatel—Neuville road was cleared by 3 A.M. on the 10th. On those of the 56th and 14th Divisions, the roads from Mercatel to Beaurains and Beaurains to Tilloy were also made practicable, trenches being bridged or filled in. The most important task of all was on the 3rd Division's front, crossed by the first-class road to Cambrai, which was paved for several miles. Here engineers and pioneers of the 3rd and 37th Divisions and Army Troops worked in relays. A ten-foot track up to the Bois des Boeufs was cleared by 10 P.M.,

¹ "The telephone spoke to Frank Maxwell: 'Are the Boches on the run?'"

"Yes."

"Is cavalry good business?"

"Yes, ten thousand times yes, but it must be done *now*. Too late 'tomorrow.'" ("Three Years with the 9th Scottish Division", p. 117.)

and the road was fit for lorries as far as Tilloy by midnight. The 9th Division had rendered the road between St. Nicholas and St. Laurent passable for wheeled vehicles by 6 P.M. The 34th Division's progress in the repair of the Bailleul road was not quite so fast, probably because, running at a sharp angle to the British front line, it had been more damaged than most ; but by 8.20 P.M. it could carry wheeled transport as far as the old No Man's Land. For that night the most advanced troops of the division could be served only by pack transport. Light railways were likewise pushed forward, but though by midnight good progress had been made with the tracks, only short sections of rail had then been laid.

The engineers had also consolidated the captured ground, concentrating for the moment upon a series of strong points in dominating positions.

The Signal Service was equally busy extending its system of communications. These had, in general, worked well, though their efficacy had varied in different formations. In some cases they had proved quite satisfactory ; in others, it had been difficult to obtain accurate information quickly, and what had come through had originated chiefly from the artillery forward-observing officers or from the air. Wires had, as was to be expected, often been cut by tanks, but the linesmen had generally repaired them quickly. Wireless telegraphy had been little used, probably owing to an objection to the laborious task of encoding messages amid the hurly-burly of a battle. Power buzzers had in some cases been valuable, but too often they had been rendered useless by damage to the amplifiers. Pigeons had carried some useful messages, but had been insufficient in numbers. One battalion complained that only a single bird had been allotted to it—and this had escaped from its basket.

The views of commanders concerning the work of the tanks varied in accordance with what they had witnessed on their own fronts. Where tanks had overcome strong points, put machine guns out of action, or made passages for infantry through uncut wire, they were enthusiastically praised. Where they had broken down there was bitter disappointment. Generally speaking, they had not had a good day. The desire to make the most of their small numbers had led to their being allotted over-ambitious tasks. They were distributed in too many " little packets ", with too many dual rôles, without depth, and without

reserves. Probably it would have paid best to reserve the majority of them for the attack on the Brown Line, where the hostile opposition was weak and all that was urgently required was to break down the wire. The models engaged, Marks I. and II., wore out rapidly in certain essential parts, so that many machines had been patched up for the battle. Owing to rapid expansion, only the original nucleus of the personnel was well trained, and the steering was often unskilled. On the other hand, where tanks created good opportunities for the infantry, the latter sometimes failed to take advantage of them, for lack of training in co-operation. There was no cause, on this day's showing, to doubt the future value of tanks. Indeed, they had accomplished enough to suggest that with better handling, a better model—such as the Mark IV. under construction—and, above all, greater numbers, they would make a powerful contribution to victory.

One of the outstanding lessons of the first day's fighting was that artillery could not be counted upon to cut adequate gaps for the passage of infantry in wire more than about 2,000 yards distant from the trenches from whence the infantry assault was launched. The wire was obliterated up to the Black, and sufficiently cut generally, though not always, up to the Blue Line. But the troops attacking the Brown Line nowhere reported finding lanes cut by the artillery. Where the infantry pierced this line—and this applies with even more force to the Oppy—Méricourt line pierced at Fampoux—it either cut the wire by hand or made use of the gaps left by the garrison.

The overhead machine-gun barrages had been valuable, giving confidence to the attack and, at least at some points, cowing the defence. This was not the first battle in which the heavy machine gun had been employed in this manner, but it may be said to have been that which established its use as an offensive weapon.

Good staff work and increased tactical skill on the part of the infantry had greatly contributed to the success. Yet the two factors which most strongly differentiated the fighting on the 9th April 1917 at Arras from that on the 1st July 1916 on the Somme were, first and most important, the increase in the British artillery and ammunition, as well as the better quality of the latter, and, secondly, the shortcomings of the German defence.

Skill alone could not have accounted for the improvement in artillery methods without an increased number of

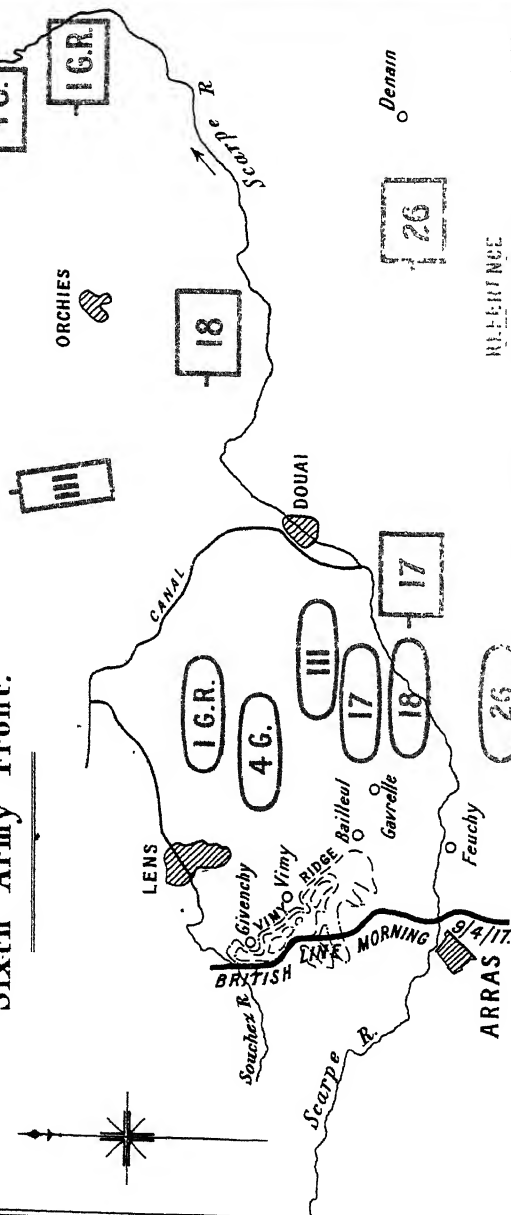
pieces. Better wire-cutting ; more effective harassing fire on the enemy's communications ; more complete neutralization, amounting in many cases to destruction, of the enemy's batteries ; heavier bombardment of strong points, likely centres of resistance, and suspected headquarters ; moving barrages—rudimentary on the 1st July 1916, and later, as the name implies, simply curtains of fire—deepened, so that beyond the actual curtain made by the 18-pdrs. heavier calibres remorselessly searched a considerable zone, as a gardener swings the nozzle of his hose backward and forward : these methods were indeed the fruits of experience, but they were also out of the reach of gunners at the beginning of the Battles of the Somme because they required a force of artillery which did not then exist.

To turn to the German side, the methods which the British employed at Arras had gradually been developing during the later stages of the Somme. Even in their embryonic form they had perturbed the German command. General Ludendorff had realized that the linear defence of every yard of shell-made desert involved needless losses as well as a disastrous moral effect upon many of the divisions which were required to practise it. To replace it he had devised a system of which the chief feature was a deep outpost zone containing fortified posts and machine-gun "nests". This was designed to afford time for large-scale counter-attacks. For the purpose counter-attack divisions were to be held in readiness, with their heads not far behind the second main line of defence, which was sited from 1,200 to 2,000 yards behind the front, with the object of recapturing the front zone, wherever it had been penetrated by the enemy. This was the most vital factor of the system. It was, indeed, mainly for the sake of the system that Germany had formed thirteen new divisions.¹

An outline, or at least a very strong hint, of this new system had fallen into the hands of the British Intelligence Service in the shape of a captured pamphlet, translated and printed on the 28th February 1917 under the title "Experiences of the recent Fighting at Verdun", but does not appear to have made a deep impression. The British artillery preparation for the Battles of Arras was based upon the expectation of defence on the old pattern. Nor was this wholly unjustified. Neither on the map nor on the ground were there to be seen many traces of a system of defence by localities. Where, as between Tilloy lez

¹ See p. 111.

GERMAN COUNTER-ATTACK DIVISIONS Sixth Army Front.



REFERENCE

Actual positions of German counter-attack divisions on morning 9/4/17

Intended positions for them on morning 9/4/17
even at the positions morning 9/4/17
late 9/4/17, i.e. morning 9/4/17, i.e. morning 9/4/17
in the battle

Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

Mofflaines and the railway triangle, there were obvious redoubts, these were subjected to special and effective treatment by the heavy artillery ; otherwise the British found themselves faced by a series of fortified lines, and they had to cut the wire in front of each as far as they could. As it proved, the new German system had not made very much progress. Sketch 11.

The German defence fell to the ground between two stools, as the British was to do a year later when its time of testing came. Contrary to Ludendorff's original design, the infantry had received orders to hold the forward zone at all costs, instead of regarding it as a true outpost system. Not only so, but it was held in such strength that when it was overrun each division lost about one-third of its infantry. The fortified localities, where constructed, rarely resisted after being outflanked. To crown all, the Army commander, Colonel-General Freiherr von Falkenhausen, refusing to believe that the British attack would be launched until the middle of April, had kept his counter-attack divisions from twelve to twenty-four hours' march from the battlefield, so as to avoid the risk of their being shelled. The mechanism of the defence was at fault ; the troops which formed its cogs were bewildered ; and their bewilderment speedily turned to demoralization.

The lesson was quickly learnt. Thenceforward there was no defence in wired-in keeps. A large proportion of the batteries were pulled back to save them from counter-battery fire, but were still able to shell the attacking infantry at effective range after it had broken into the forward system of defence. This zone was thinned out, and south of the Scarpe at least there were soon signs of a theory of elastic defence, based on Ludendorff's manuals issued at the end of 1916.

The artillery protection line now became the true defensive front, everything forward of it being regarded as an outpost zone. Local counter-attacks were made by the reserves of the front-line divisions, but the big " rebound " of the elastic system was the task of the counter-attack division or *Eingreifdivision*.¹ And this type of division was

¹ " Counter-attack division " is the best our limited military vocabulary can make of the phrase, but it is an inadequate translation, and fails to bring out the significance of the original. This has the sense of both interlocking and intervening. May it not be that the chequerwise formation of the Roman Legion, avowedly drawn upon in subsequent developments of the defensive system, was already present in the minds of those who gave the reserve division its title and laid down its rôle ?

amply provided with lorries, so that it could intervene at any point on a front of several miles.¹

If not all the objectives had been taken, a great victory had been won, probably as great as any but the most sanguine of British commanders had expected. Yet this was only the first stage. The problems ahead were equally serious and the factors were less easy to estimate. The next few days would show how far commanders and troops were able to exploit the success gained on Easter Monday.

NOTE

THE DEFENCE ON THE 9TH APRIL

As the German reinforcements came up piecemeal on the 9th, 10th, and 11th April, it is most convenient to treat the detailed events and movements of those three days together. An account of them will be found in a Note at the end of the following chapter, which is devoted to the British operations on the 10th and 11th. Here will be given only a general sketch of the defence.²

The German divisions which faced the British assault were distributed in more depth than on the Somme. We may, for example, compare the dispositions of the *31st Reserve Regiment (18th Reserve Division)* about Wancourt with those of the *109th Reserve Regiment (28th Reserve Division)* in the Mametz sector on the 1st July 1916. The former had one battalion in the first and second trenches south of Neuville Vitasse; one battalion at Wancourt, two and a half miles from the front; and one battalion in reserve at Boiry Notre Dame, six miles from the front. The latter had two battalions in shell-hole positions in line, and one battalion in a trench about half a mile in rear.³

Nevertheless, at Arras, though the foremost trenches had been battered almost out of recognition and the wire entanglements cut to shreds, the deep dug-outs were full of men. Except on the right of the British VII. Corps, where the bombardment had not had the same effect as further north against either the wire or the trenches of the Hindenburg Line, this position was everywhere overrun.

The garrisons of the third trench and intermediate line—the “*Zwischenstellung*” north of the Scarpe, the Tilloy line and the “*Artillerieschutzstellung*” south of it—were disposed mainly in “island” positions, lengths of trench kept clear about the deep dug-outs, with equally isolated machine-gun posts between the

¹ Sketch 14 (facing p. 291), showing the German dispositions at Monchy on 14th April, gives a good idea of the system.

It is intended to deal more fully with the German method of defence in the volume devoted to the Battles of Ypres, where its development may be most profitably studied. The Note at the end of this chapter illustrates the breakdown on this occasion.

² “*Die Osterschlacht*” and German regimental histories.

³ See “1916” Vol. I., p. 369.

trench lines. The impression is given that the troops themselves showed little enthusiasm in constructing or repairing these localities, in the efficacy of which they did not believe.

The defence can be divided into two distinct categories: that in which efforts were made to carry out orders under the new scheme, and that in which local commanders tore up the scheme. In the former, the "island" positions with few exceptions surrendered or were abandoned by their garrisons. In the latter, where battalion commanders extended on a line which caught up the troops streaming back and gave them a rallying position, which was reinforced by any available garrisons of strong points in rear, the British advance was in several cases held up for considerable periods and with damaging effect.

Where the British attack succeeded, two battalions of each German regiment were accounted for, the foremost destroyed and the second either destroyed or driven back fighting, generally with heavy loss. The third battalions were in billets three to six miles from the battlefield, and arrived individually, to form the nucleus of the defence that evening and next morning. The leading troops of the reserve divisions in a few cases made an appearance that night, but in no case were they in action before the following day.

The new German system depended on early action by the reserve or counter-attack divisions. These, as the British knew, were too far away to intervene. Consequently, the defence collapsed almost everywhere, except where the Hindenburg Line made defence an easy matter under any system. "Now we have to suffer", the Army Group commander noted in his diary, "because the *Sixth Army* "despite my strongly expressed wishes, failed . . . to move its "reserves up closer to the front-line divisions."¹

¹ Rupprecht ii., p. 135.

CHAPTER IX

THE BATTLES OF ARRAS 1917 : THE FIRST BATTLE OF THE SCARPE (*continued*)

(Maps 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 ; Sketches A, 8, 9, 10)

THE FIGHTING SOUTH OF THE SCARPE, 10TH APRIL

If the victory won on Easter Monday was to be exploited, the remainder of the Brown Line must be quickly secured. That night, accordingly, General Allenby issued brief telegraphic orders for the three corps to capture it at 8 A.M. on the 10th : they were then to advance to the Green Line : the cavalry was to be prepared to move at any time after 7 A.M. The orders of Lieut.-General Snow, commanding the VII. Corps have already been outlined.¹

Unfortunately these orders had to be modified. The commander of the 56th Division, Major-General C. P. A. Hull, telephoned that he could not attack at 8 A.M. because the Hindenburg Line, where his troops were still fighting with bomb and bayonet, was unlikely to be cleared by daylight. It was finally agreed that the assault should be delivered at midday. The prospects of the cavalry going through before dark were thus diminished. Lieut.-General Snow was, nevertheless, hopeful that his corps might be able to reach the Green Line speedily, since he had received a report that the Germans were apparently retiring from the Brown Line. He directed that after the capture of the latter the advance should be continued with the object of securing the high ground beyond the Cojeul. He instructed the 21st and 30th Divisions to take part in this movement if possible, but admitted that the advance must develop from the left. It still appeared that these two divisions could effect little until their front had been disengaged for them.

¹ See p. 213.

The weather was at least as unfavourable as that of the previous day. The air was cold; the sky was overcast; visibility was low; and violent squalls out of the south-west brought with them showers of snow or sleet. The conditions hampered the Royal Air Force, and four machines were wrecked after being forced down by snow-showers. Nevertheless, maps indicating the positions of flares lit by the infantry were dropped at report centres; a number of active hostile batteries were reported by air artillery observers and engaged with their co-operation; and the single-seater fighters made frequent attacks with machine-gun fire on parties of German troops.

Maps 3,
4, 7.
Sketches
A, 8.

During the night some progress had been made in clearing the stretch of the Hindenburg Line near Neuville Vitasse. Before dawn the 1/14th London (168th Brigade, 56th Division) had by a series of bombing attacks captured the section north of the Neuville—Wancourt road. South of the road the 167th Brigade, aided by the 19/Manchester of the 30th Division, also gained ground. While, however, this brigade's bombing operations down the Hindenburg Line towards the Wancourt line—conducted with skill and enterprise but too intricate to describe at length—were successful, its left, attacking the Wancourt line over the open, failed to get in. At the end of the day the bombers had captured the whole of the Hindenburg Line down to but exclusive of its junction with the Wancourt line. On the left the 1/8th Middlesex and 1/3rd London had been held up 200 yards from the trench by uncut wire. The enemy had by no means abandoned the struggle, even for the Hindenburg Line, much less for the Wancourt line, as was shown by the fact that some three hundred prisoners fell into the hands of the 56th Division. The depth of sticky mud in the trenches was, however, an obstacle as serious as the hostile resistance. One officer of the 1/7th Middlesex was bogged so deeply that it took two hours to dig him out.

The progress of the 56th Division had so far been insufficient to allow the 30th on its right to advance. Similarly, the fact that the 56th had not been able to drive the German machine guns off Hill 90, south-west of Wancourt, seriously hampered the attack of the 14th Division on its left. The first objective of the 14th was, it will be recalled, the Wancourt—Feuchy line on the front allotted on the 9th April to the 56th Division, in addition to its own. The attack was to be carried out by the 48rd Brigade.

Orders had been issued that all available heavy artillery should bombard the Wancourt—Feuchy line at 10.30 A.M., lifting off it at 11.45. There was to be a barrage of six 18-pdr. batteries creeping at the rate of 100 yards in three minutes to 300 yards east of the position. Four 4.5-inch howitzer batteries were to bombard the trench system and the two sunken roads passing through it to Wancourt and Héninel, lifting at six minutes before Zero to Wancourt. At 10.50 A.M. a message came to hand from the 56th Division that it was starting—not assaulting—at Zero. The barrage was therefore put back 35 minutes. Major-General Couper ordered the 41st Brigade, not hitherto in action, to assemble behind the 43rd, so as to be ready to push through it to the capture of Wancourt and the high ground beyond the Cojeul.

The 6/K.O.Y.L.I. and 10/Durham L.I. had no opposition to face from their front, where, in fact, except for small posts, the Wancourt—Feuchy line had been evacuated.¹ Their right, however, was raked by machine-gun fire from Hill 90, with the consequence that they edged away to the left. After cutting gaps in the wire, both battalions entered the Wancourt trenches on a frontage comprising only about the left third of the brigade's objective but including several hundred yards of that of the 3rd Division on the left. It was, in fact, only north of the divisional boundary that the support trench was captured.

At 2.15 P.M. the 7/K.R.R.C. and 7/Rifle Brigade, the leading battalions of the 41st Brigade (Br.-General P. C. B. Skinner), advanced from the Hindenburg Line, up to which they had moved in the course of the morning. They had orders to relieve the 43rd Brigade, then believed to be on its objective, and if possible to push on to the second objective. Moving up the valley in artillery formation, the 7/K.R.R.C. in its turn came under fire from Hill 90. Reconnaissances found no trace of the troops of the 43rd Brigade, for the good reason that they were far away to the left; but a heavy snowstorm blowing into the faces of the enemy provided an opportunity that was very creditably taken, and under its cover two companies entered the Wancourt—Feuchy line. An attempt by the 8/Rifle Brigade, which had now come up on the right, to capture Hill 90 was, however, defeated. By evening, when the relief of the 43rd Brigade had been carried out, both trenches of the Wancourt—Feuchy line were occupied

¹ See Note at end of Chapter.

in the section entered on the 3rd Division's front, and one line was held down to about the Tilloy—Wancourt road. South of the road the 8/Rifle Brigade formed a defensive flank in the open and established posts in touch with the left of the 56th Division.

The VII. Corps, though it had made useful progress, had not been able to capture the Wancourt—Feuchy line quickly enough to obtain a good opportunity for exploitation. That evening, too, its right flank suffered a set-back. On the front of the 21st Division the 64th Brigade had in the course of the day repulsed thrusts by German bombers from the second line of the Hindenburg system, which was still in the hands of the enemy. Soon after 7 P.M. he launched a heavier attack, preceded by a shower of small trench-mortar bombs. He assailed the right battalion, the 1/East Yorkshire, from the right flank and even the right rear, as well as frontally across the open, and drove it out of the first-line trench. The rest of the brigade was forced to conform to its retirement.¹ The troops were rallied 200 yards from the lost position.

Two companies of the 10/K.O.Y.L.I., which were dug in on the St. Martin—Fontaine road, had orders from Br.-General Headlam to counter-attack immediately in such an emergency. Observing, however, that part of the British barrage was falling short, the commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel F. J. M. Postlethwaite, decided to wait until the artillery had been warned. The brigadier, for his part, considered that, had a counter-attack been launched on the first sign that troops in front were falling back, it would have been possible to rally them in time to retake the trench. If the opportunity had existed it was lost by the delay; for the Germans soon had machine guns in action. The divisional commander, Major-General Campbell, then forbade a counter-attack. He was acting on the principle that, though a counter-attack carried out within a few minutes while the victorious enemy is still in confusion may well be successful, in default of that it is advisable to wait and mount one deliberately. He now preferred to entrust the operation to the fresh 62nd Brigade, which was already under orders to relieve the 64th.

¹ On the left of the captured position the block in the trench was held by a bombing section of the 10/K.O.Y.L.I. In the course of the early counter-attacks Private H. Waller, the only man left on his feet, bombed for an hour and finally repulsed the German bombers. In the later attack all his section were again hit, but he continued to hold the block till mortally wounded. He was awarded the posthumous honour of the V.C.

Map 5.
Sketch 9. On the front of the VI. Corps Lieut.-General Haldane ordered the headquarters of all divisions—except that of the 37th, at St. Sauveur—to be advanced, as it appeared to him that the commanders could not otherwise adequately control their troops. That of the 3rd Division was moved to a dug-out east of the Bois des Bœufs, that of the 15th to the eastern outskirts of Arras, and, on the following day, that of the 12th to the Place Ste. Croix, in Arras. The attack of the 3rd and 12th Divisions on the Wancourt—Feuchy line was postponed until noon to conform to that of the VII. Corps, but the 12th Division was directed to capture the remaining redoubt at Feuchy Chapel before the main advance began. Lieut.-General Haldane had also issued orders that every effort should be made to turn the defences from the gap already created in them by the 15th Division on the left. He was apparently unaware till morning that troops of the 63rd Brigade, 37th Division, were on Orange Hill. When he learnt this he issued another telegraphic order, at 10.30 A.M., that after the remainder of the Wancourt—Feuchy line had been taken the 12th Division was to seize Chapel Hill and the 37th was to advance to the capture of Monchy le Preux; the 3rd and 15th Divisions were then to move forward on its either flank and to consolidate the Green Line, the 3rd from Guémappe to the Cambrai road, and the 15th from the northern outskirts of Monchy to the Scarpe.

The 3rd Division's attack was carried out by the 8th Brigade with all four battalions in line, under a barrage similar to that of the 14th Division. It was a complete success, though, as has been recorded, the southern part of the objective was actually taken by troops of the 14th Division. The defenders were only a handful, yet nearly one hundred prisoners were taken. It is recorded that in this division carrying-parties were now sent back to bring up the great-coats, a real boon in view of the continued cold and the occasional showers of snow or sleet.

The 12th Division, which had failed to capture the Wancourt—Feuchy line, had been given a helping hand by the 15th, the 6/Cameron Highlanders having during the night bombed down both trenches for a distance of some six hundred yards. Nevertheless, the objective of the 12th Division was still nearly a mile long and its wire was almost wholly uncut. Br.-General Vincent, commanding the 35th Brigade, ordered the 5/R. Berkshire, together with six companies of the 36th Brigade put at his disposal for the

purpose by Major-General Scott, to cross the Wancourt—Feuchy line where it was in the hands of the 15th Division and to turn it by wheeling right and moving down behind it; at the same time the other three battalions would advance frontally. These tactics, on their small scale, succeeded, as they might well have done if carried out on a greater scale the previous evening. A single tank is reported by C Battalion to have done good service in the neighbourhood of Feuchy Chapel. The few Germans remaining in this section of the position were captured. Patrols were quickly pushed forward to Chapel Hill, which was abandoned by the enemy. The task of the 12th Division was thus complete.

A heavier one was awaiting the 37th Division, all three brigades of which had been deployed the previous evening and committed to the attack though not seriously engaged. During the night the 111th and 112th Brigades were extricated from the neighbourhood of the Wancourt—Feuchy line, where they had been intermingled with the troops of the 12th Division, and reorganized in rear. Each brigade was to carry out more or less the rôle allotted to it on the 9th April; that is, the 111th to capture Monchy le Preux, and the 112th and 63rd to cover its flanks. As, however, the 63rd was now established on Orange Hill and through the gap, whereas the other two were not, the sequence of events was to be altered and the 63rd was first of all to push on and gain all the ground it could between Monchy and the Scarpe. The 111th was to follow it and swing right to attack Monchy. And as soon as the 12th Division had taken Chapel Hill the 112th would pass through it and endeavour to reach a line between La Bergère on the Cambrai road and the mill south-east of Monchy.

Movement on the part of the 63rd Brigade was by no means easy, owing to the dominating position of Monchy. The 8/Somerset L.I. first of all sent forward two companies to make good Lone Copse valley; but it was found that the only possible method of advance was to dribble small parties forward from one shell-hole to another. This method had to be followed also by companies of the 8/Lincolnshire and 4/Middlesex which moved next, and the 10/York & Lancaster found itself unable to advance at all. A few minutes after 11 A.M. observers on Orange Hill could see British troops approaching the north-east outskirts of Monchy. Progress had been so good that it looked as

though there might be an opportunity for cavalry action, and Major-General Williams so informed VI. Corps headquarters. What observers did not realize was the volume of the fire which met the advance. Actually, by 3.30 P.M. only four and a half companies of the brigade had reached the valley. When the 111th Brigade attacked Monchy two companies of the Somerset swung right-handed up the hill towards some enclosures half a mile north-west of the village and reached the hedges. Though unable to penetrate them, they enabled the brigade to fulfil its rôle of covering the left flank of the attack. Its own left was covered by the 45th Brigade of the 15th Division.

The 111th Brigade, which had followed the 63rd, launched its attack from the northern slope of Orange Hill with commendable speed, and made ground rapidly. It had no artillery support, except from the heavy batteries which were bombarding Monchy, because the guns of the XV. Brigade R.H.A. and the LXIII. and LXXI. Brigades R.F.A. did not come into action in advanced positions until about 2.30 P.M., after having supported the attack on the Wancourt—Feuchy line. Nor did the VI. Corps heavy artillery venture to engage the German batteries firing from Greenland Hill, north of the Scarpe, because the 1st Cavalry Division had been ordered to operate in that direction and its position was not known. This hostile fire from north of the river and that of machine guns from Monchy itself brought the 10th and 18th Royal Fusiliers to a halt about five hundred yards west of the village. On the left the leading troops penetrated half-way through the enclosures which had checked the Somerset L.I., but were withdrawn to their western edge at the fall of darkness.

On the right of the 111th Brigade the 112th had to await the capture of Feuchy Chapel and the Wancourt—Feuchy line in its neighbourhood by the 12th Division. When that had been accomplished, the brigade's action was such as could not, for smoothness and promptitude, have been excelled on manœuvres. The 8/East Lancashire and 6/Bedfordshire were away over Chapel Hill in artillery formation before the enemy could bring down a barrage to check them. Eight guns of the 112th Machine-Gun Company, hastily installed on Chapel and Orange Hills, at once began to barrage Guémappe and Monchy over their heads. The enemy's fire soon forced the two battalions to deploy, but the East Lancashire pressed on till finally

held up on a north and south line through Les Fosses Farm on the Cambrai road, 1,500 yards east of the Wancourt—Feuchy line. The Bedfordshire on the right advanced even further, until its right flank was only six hundred yards from the north-west corner of Guémappe; but this flank was completely in the air and had to be withdrawn 200 yards. Companies of the 11/R. Warwickshire and 10/L. North Lancashire and a detachment of the VI. Corps Cyclists were sent forward to thicken the line, and under cover of dusk another attempt was made to advance. The open right flank and the Monchy machine guns on the left rendered this impossible. In any case, the 8/East Lancashire only received the order at 7.30 p.m., the exact hour at which the artillery lifted its fire.

Contact aeroplanes had been out since dawn, flying over the troops and calling for the lighting of flares by the infantry. The lines of flares were then marked on maps which were dropped at the corps report centres. Orange and Chapel Hills, however, afforded such good observation that reports of progress generally came as accurately and rather more quickly from the ground. The observation posts on Orange Hill gave the 12th Division artillery excellent targets about Monchy during the afternoon, though these were frequently blotted out by snow.

As already stated, General Allenby had originally ordered the Cavalry Corps to be prepared to advance south of the Scarpe at any time after 7 a.m. that morning. Owing to the postponement of the assault on the Wancourt—Feuchy line, he had put back the hour to 11 a.m. At 11.30 and 11.45 a.m. orders were sent by Lieut.-General Kavanagh to the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Divisions to have their heads south-east and east of Arras by noon and then to advance astride the Cambrai road.¹ The 8th Brigade of the 3rd Cavalry Division had already moved in consequence of a report that troops of the 37th Division had been seen entering Monchy. Though the two divisions had as yet been able to effect nothing, the horses had already had hard work, exposed the while to bad weather.

¹ Orders were also addressed to the 1st Cavalry Division. It had originally been in G.H.Q. reserve; on the afternoon of 9th April one brigade group (1st) had been put at the disposal of Third Army and another (9th) at that of First Army. On the 10th the whole of the 1st Cavalry Division, less 9th Brigade, was put at the disposal of Third Army, and at 11.15 a.m. came under Cavalry Corps headquarters. The orders addressed to the division will be given when dealing with the operations north of the Scarpe, on the front of XVII. Corps.

Congestion of the roads had made the return to bivouacs on the previous night so laborious that the greater part of the 2nd Cavalry Division had not got in until 3 A.M., and E Battery R.H.A. not until 5.30.

At 3 P.M. Major-General W. H. Greenly, commanding the 2nd Cavalry Division, ordered the 3rd and 5th Cavalry Brigades to move to their final positions of readiness, which were, for the 3rd, Hill 90, and for the 5th, just west of the Wancourt—Feuchy line south of Orange Hill. But it soon became clear that there was nothing to be done by the cavalry in this quarter. The advanced guard of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade came under fire from Hill 90, which, as has been explained, was held all day by the enemy. The 5th Brigade had no such immediate obstacle, but reports from the infantry and from patrols showed that the line of the Cojeul was still strongly held. Major-General Greenly could only issue an order, sent off at 7.40 P.M., that the two brigades should be in their present positions by 5 A.M. next day, and giving them the option of remaining where they were for the night or withdrawing to bivouac. The 3rd Brigade went back to Ronville, because water was lacking and there was so much barbed wire east of Neuville Vitasse that the brigade could not have moved had it been shelled during the night. The 5th Brigade stayed, and was shelled, losing some horses. The men of the 20th Hussars spent the night sitting in big shell-holes, holding their horses, which stood in circles round the edges. Pack-horses brought up six pounds of oats per horse.

The 3rd Cavalry Division had no better fortune, though it seemed at first sight to have a better opportunity. Learning that the Wancourt—Feuchy line had been captured and that the infantry of the 37th Division was pressing forward on Monchy, Major-General J. Vaughan at 2.30 P.M. ordered the 6th and 8th Brigades to move on their original objectives, the 6th south of Monchy on Vis en Artois, the 8th north of Monchy on Boiry Notre Dame. The 6th closed up to the Wancourt—Feuchy line north of the Cambrai road, but Monchy on its hill-top was still untaken and spitting fire, so that mounted men could not move across the open, rolling downland south of it. North of the village there was more cover, and it seemed just possible that the 8th Brigade might be able to make ground here. When at 5 P.M. a squadron of the 10th Hussars went forward towards Lone Copse, it was the fire from north of

the Scarpe even more than that from Monchy which drove it back. Troops of that regiment and of the Essex Yeomanry then by an advance at the gallop made an attempt to seize the spur north-east of the village along which ran the road to Pelves, but again the fire was too hot. Once more, however, a snowstorm came at a lucky moment, and under its cover the troops were withdrawn without heavy loss. Both brigades bivouacked west of the Wancourt—Feuchy line and north of the Cambrai road, the 8th suffering a number of casualties from artillery fire during the night.

A disappointing day it seemed after the great achievement of the 9th and the hopes which that had aroused. And yet, for the second day of a battle, an advance of over a mile on the whole front of the VI. Corps and the capture of the enemy's last organized line of defence short of the Drocourt—Quéant position were not to be despised. In many other battles past and to come they would have been reckoned a triumph. The two most unfavourable factors in the situation were, first, that the delay in reaching the stage of exploitation had given the enemy time to reinforce, so that fresh troops would probably be met on the morrow; and, secondly, that two days' fighting had considerably wearied and weakened some of the first-line divisions. Already that afternoon Lieut.-General Haldane had asked the Army commander for a division to relieve the 12th. General Allenby refused this request, doubtless because he was loth to break up his reserve corps while there was still a possibility of employing it as a whole, especially in view of the fact that the Fifth Army was attacking the Hindenburg Line at Bullecourt next day.¹ It was evident, however, that the question of reliefs for several divisions would shortly become urgent, and that if the fresh ones were put in on the present line the prospect of wide exploitation would become remote. Much depended on the measure of success gained next day, especially at Monchy le Preux. Yet already it appeared probable that a heavy penalty would be exacted for the failure to throw open the whole breadth of the gateway between the Cambrai road and Feuchy at a moment when the Germans had been able to do virtually nothing to keep it shut.

¹ As will be shown in the following chapter, General Allenby was unable to use the divisions of the XVIII. Corps for reliefs without the permission of G.H.Q.

THE FIGHTING NORTH OF THE SCARPE
10TH APRILMap 6.
Sketch
10.

About 10.30 A.M. Sir Douglas Haig saw the commanders of the First and Third Armies at St. Pol. He was aware that a critical stage of the battle was approaching. He urged on General Allenby the importance of keeping the enemy on the move during the next twenty-four hours, before reserves could be brought up to meet the advance. He was impressed by the strength of Monchy le Preux, and suggested that if the VI. Corps was held up there, the XVII. should push forward north of the Scarpe and then wheel south-east in rear of the village.

The overnight orders of Lieut.-General Fergusson, commanding the XVII. Corps, were, in brief, that the 4th, 34th, and 51st Divisions should push on to the Green Line and consolidate the positions which afforded the best observation. The 4th Division was already on this line on its left, though 500 yards short of it at Fampoux, and made no attempt to reach it at this point during the morning, in view of a more extended operation planned for the afternoon.

The 34th and 51st Divisions had still to capture the Point du Jour line on the left brigade front of the former and the whole front of the latter. The 34th quickly got its sector, though the enemy made a fight for the Maison de la Côte, standing, as its name implies, in a commanding position, with a wide view across the plain. The 103rd Brigade was, however, unable to establish itself in strength greater than a few posts on the Green Line owing to fire from the trees and houses of Bailleul. In Gavrelle there was at this time no sign of life. At dusk the enemy, over a battalion strong, was seen advancing from the sunken Fampoux—Bailleul road, and the posts of the 103rd Brigade were withdrawn so that the barrage could be fired on the S.O.S. lines. The counter-attack was caught fair and square, and at once dispersed. The 102nd Brigade found no difficulty in occupying the Green Line on its front, and the patrols of the 101st were able to go forward half a mile without encountering any opposition. Small parties of Germans in the old gunpits gave themselves up, and many abandoned guns were discovered, but they were generally badly damaged and stuck so fast in the mud that it was impossible to move them without horses. Again it is probable that Gavrelle was to be had for the asking, but

fresh troops would have been needed if the smallest effort had been demanded. The advanced troops of the 34th Division on the bare uplands were chilled to the bone, and there had been deaths from exposure during the night.

On the front of the 51st Division the 1/5th Gordon Highlanders, attached to the 152nd Brigade, attacked simultaneously with the left of the 34th Division. There was no creeping barrage, but a protective barrage was put down beyond the objective. Lieut.-Colonel N. McTaggart had been ordered to attack with only two companies on the supposition that the 154th Brigade on his left was on the Brown Line. Personally convinced that it was not, he put in all four companies and covered his left by a bombing party in the Zehner Weg. The men advanced with such resolution that the Germans began to fall back from the Point du Jour trenches, thus enabling the Gordons to cut the wire. They then pushed on to the sunken Maison de la Côte—Arleux road, and could probably have reached the railway, but this seemed too risky in view of the heavy fire from the left and the fact that no touch could be found with the 154th Brigade. This fact converted into certainty the doubt as to whether that brigade was in the Point du Jour line.

The headquarters of the 154th Brigade had not discovered during the night that the reports of the previous evening were incorrect. No orders had been sent to it to attack because its troops were still believed to be in possession of their objective, and as late as 9.35 A.M. on the 10th divisional headquarters was informed by it that this was the case. When Major-General Harper learnt that the brigade was still facing south in the communication trenches leading to the Point du Jour line; he ordered it to capture that line by 2 P.M. The attempt to do so took the form of bombing attacks up the communication trenches. They were held up by machine-gun fire. Another attack was ordered for 8 P.M. but made no progress. A line of posts was, however, dug across the crest of the hill, in touch with the Canadians at the Commandant's House. A mistake as to their position such as that made by the leading battalions of this brigade might have occurred in the case of any troops; but that some twenty hours later the error should have persisted was proof of a serious lack of liaison.¹

¹ Commenting on these pages, Lieut.-Colonel L. M. Dyson, CCLVI. Brigade R.F.A., states that about mid-day he reconnoitred the Point du

During the morning Lieut.-General Fergusson had told General Allenby that he did not think it would be possible to exploit the success won at Fampoux on the 9th by sending forward formed bodies of infantry, because there was as yet no chance of giving them adequate artillery support.¹ He did, however, consider that a rapid advance by cavalry might succeed in seizing Greenland Hill, which dominated all the ground within a circle of some two thousand yards radius. In this case he would employ the 4th Division to support the cavalry. It is to be presumed that the reason why the cavalry was not ordered to act here during the morning lay in the situation south of the Scarpe. So far as the XVII. Corps itself was concerned, cavalry might equally well have been sent forward during the morning; for what was happening at and north of the Masion de la Côte could have little effect on an advance through Fampoux. At all events, it was only in the Cavalry Corps order of 11.45 A.M. already mentioned that the 1st Cavalry Brigade of the 1st Division (Major-General R. L. Mullens) was ordered to gain Greenland Hill.² It had a considerably longer march, from Capelle Fermont, 8 miles north-west of Arras, through St. Eloi, St. Nicholas, and Athies, than the leading troops of the 2nd and 3rd Cavalry Divisions south of the Scarpe. In a later order the 1st Cavalry Division was given the ambitious programme not only of occupying Greenland Hill and Plouvain but also of sending out reconnaissances to Vitry en Artois, Fresnes les Montauban, Gavrelle, Izel les Equerchin, and Oppy.

Meanwhile Lieut.-General Fergusson had informed Major-General Lambton, commanding the 4th Division, that one brigade of the 9th Division and the three field

Jour line from near the Commandant's House and observed movement in the front trench for a short distance south of the divisional boundary. He was told by a Canadian forward observing officer that the trench was here occupied by men of 51st Division in touch with the Canadians. Further south, the line was held by Germans, who fired at him. About another 400 yards still further south he saw some Highlanders passing in and out of gaps in the wire. It appears, therefore, that a few men of the 154th Brigade had made their way in, certainly at one point, and probably at two.

¹ Of the seven artillery brigades attached to the 9th Division artillery only two, the XXXII. and LI., were in a position to support an advance that morning. The XIV. Brigade R.H.A. moved up and registered in the afternoon, and the XXIII. Brigade R.F.A. moved later, but did not come into action. The XXIX., L., and LII. had made one move, to the old British front line area, on the 9th, and were now all out of range.

² See p. 251.

artillery brigades then east of the old front line were at his disposal to support the cavalry. Major-General Lambton had already issued orders to the 12th and 11th Brigades to secure the Gavrelle—Rœux road from the railway station to the inn half-way between it and Gavrelle by an attack to be carried out at 3 P.M. On receiving orders at 1.25 P.M. to support the cavalry advance, he cancelled his own orders and instead directed the two brigades to send out fighting patrols, gain ground where possible, and clear up the situation by the time the cavalry arrived.

Before this amended programme reached the front line, Br.-General Carton de Wiart, commanding the 12th Brigade, had made a preliminary move. The 1/King's Own, which was to form a flank to the brigade's advance, along the railway embankment to the station, had sent out a company, which secured some hundred yards of the embankment and the railway bridge over the Scarpe. It was then pinned to its position, and when at 2.30 P.M. the rest of the battalion moved out of Fampoux on the southern side with the object of crossing the embankment, it was checked by heavy machine-gun fire from the Chemical Works. Br.-General Berners, commanding the 11th Brigade, ordered the 1/Somerset L.I. and 1/Hampshire to send out strong patrols towards the Gavrelle—Rœux road. However, the first two platoons of the Somerset which moved out of Hyderabad Redoubt were almost annihilated by machine-gun fire, and the attempt came to an end.

Such was the unpromising news which greeted the 5th Dragoon Guards, advanced guard to the 1st Cavalry Brigade, when it reached Fampoux about 4.30 P.M. The brigade commander, Br.-General E. Makins, conferred with the officers commanding the 1/King's Own and 2/Duke of Wellington's. It did not appear to him that mounted action was feasible or that dismounted action was likely to be more effective than that of the infantry. While he was considering the situation heavy snow began to fall; then, at 5.30 P.M., it was reported that the Germans were counter-attacking the 4th Division. The counter-attack was weak, perhaps only a reconnaissance in force, and was at once beaten back by artillery fire. However, as snow continued to fall and it was now growing dark, Br.-General Makins was confirmed in his view that there was nothing to be done. He therefore ordered a withdrawal to Athies.

The net result of the day's operations on the front of

the XVII. Corps was, then, the capture of about a mile of the Brown Line, a meagre gain after the brilliant achievement of the 9th April. At Fampoux, the only point where the Oppy—Méricourt defences had been breached, no serious attempt to exploit that success had been made, owing to the lack of artillery support. But it does not appear that Br.-General Tudor, commanding the artillery which was in support of the 4th Division, had been pressed to advance more field artillery brigades or that, at a pinch, he could not have done so during the night of the 9th, though there might have been a certain difficulty in supplying them, owing to the congestion and dilapidation of the roads. It is clear from the orders issued by the Third Army and the Cavalry Corps that it was mainly south of the Scarpe that exploitation was envisaged, and that the operations of the XVII. Corps were considered subsidiary to those of the VI. Sir Douglas Haig realized that it might be desirable to modify the plan, as he showed in his morning conversation with General Allenby ; but it was then too late to do so on that day. Next day the enemy's artillery was to be stronger.

G.H.Q.'s estimate of the captures made by the First, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Armies on the 9th and 10th April was 11,000 prisoners, 103 guns, 163 machine guns, and 60 trench mortars.¹

THE CAPTURE OF MONCHY LE PREUX 11TH APRIL

At the outset it may be said that the 11th April was the last day on which exploitation of the victory was attempted on a grand scale. On this occasion the Fifth Army's attack at Bullecourt, whereby it was hoped to breach the Hindenburg Line and put the 4th Cavalry Division through to join hands with the rest of the Cavalry Corps, was to coincide with the renewed attack of the Third Army.

This was to be an attack *à fond*. The Army commander's telegraphic orders of the previous evening were marked by a refusal to admit that the battle had yet degenerated to the stage of limited thrusts against local objectives. They began with the injunction that the three corps were to reach the Green Line on the morrow with their

¹ The minor operations of the Fourth and Fifth Armies on the 9th have been described in Chapter VI. There were none of any importance on the 10th.

main bodies, with outposts on the Sensée from Fontaine Maps 4, 5, 7. Sketches 8, 9.
lez Croisilles to Vis en Artois and thence to Pelves and, north of the Scarpe, Greenland Hill; the Cavalry Corps was to move at 5 A.M., to assist the attack of the Fifth Army and reconnoitre the Drocourt—Quéant Switch. Then, however, followed the sweeping clause—expressive, possibly, of hope rather than of expectation—that the VII. and VI. Corps would “reach the Drocourt—Quéant Line”. The XVII. Corps was given the relatively close objectives of Greenland Hill and Plouvain.¹ Ten tanks, dug out or repaired, were available, four to assist the VII. Corps against the Hindenburg Line, and six to co-operate with the VI. Corps against Monchy le Preux.

General Allenby emphasized the spirit of these orders in another telegram to the corps commanders, which ran: “The A.C. wishes all troops to understand that Third Army is now pursuing a defeated enemy and that risks must be freely taken. Isolated enemy detachments in farms and villages must not be allowed to delay the general progress. Such points must be masked and passed by. They can be dealt with by troops in rear.”

The enemy had indeed been defeated, but it was to be proved that the conditions were not those of a pursuit. Nor was it a case of masking isolated detachments but rather one of defeating and driving back practically a new army. Though he did not recognize that this situation had yet been reached, General Allenby did realize that it might be approaching. Early on the morning of the 11th his chief General Staff officer, Major-General L. J. Bols, telephoned to the VI. Corps that this was, in the Army commander's view, “the crucial day”, and that, if the enemy could not be kept on the move now, stagnation might ensue.

Lieut.-General Snow, commanding the VII. Corps, ordered the 14th Division to advance on Wancourt, simultaneously with the attack of the 3rd Division on its left against Guémappe. The 56th he at first ordered to seize Hill 90 during the night, but was informed by Major-General Hull that this was impossible and could only be done in the morning. The 21st and 30th Divisions were to capture the Hindenburg Line at 6 A.M., if they found

¹ See Appendix 45. It is to be noted that this telegraphic order was issued to Signals at 7.10 P.M. It had to pass through the headquarters of corps, division, and brigade, each of which had to expand it in accordance with its own circumstances, before it reached the headquarters of the battalions which were to attack at 5 A.M.

themselves unable to make their way into it during the night.

Major-General Campbell, commanding the 21st Division, had, as already stated, brought up his reserve brigade, the 62nd (Br.-General C. G. Rawling). During the 10th, prior to the German counter-attack of that evening, field and heavy artillery had renewed the effort to cut the Hindenburg wire, but patrols at night found only a few gaps. The attack, carried out by the 1/Lincolnshire and 10/Green Howards, completely broke down. Every one of the five lanes discovered in the wire was swept by machine guns firing from low concrete casemates, which were almost undamaged by the bombardment. The casualties of the two battalions numbered about 280.

The 30th Division did not make a frontal attack of this character. Two gaps had been found in the Hindenburg wire on either bank of the Cojeul, each about 150 yards from the stream. Br.-General the Hon. F. C. Stanley, commanding the 89th Brigade, decided that each should be attacked by a company of the 2/Bedfordshire, and that after an entry had been made the remaining two companies, moving astride the Cojeul, should advance on Héninel. Meanwhile two companies of the 20/King's entering the northern gap behind the Bedfordshire, would bomb up the Hindenburg trenches to meet the bombers working down from the 56th Division's front. At 1 A.M. Major-General Shea telephoned that two tanks would be available, but, as their employment would have necessitated an alteration in the barrage, Br.-General Stanley asked that they should act against the Hindenburg Line outside his brigade front, west of the Hénin—Wancourt road. His own attack failed, in part because the artillery was firing at too long a range and could not be advanced while the enemy held the high ground on the right of the 89th Brigade. However, with the aid of the four tanks of D Battalion, the 167th Brigade of the 56th Division carried out a remarkable series of bombing operations which finally disengaged his front. The 7/Middlesex first forced an entry into the Wancourt—Feuchy line, where it crossed the Hindenburg Line, capturing 118 prisoners and bringing the battalion's total to 315 in 48 hours' continuous fighting. By 5 P.M. the 1/9th London—detached from the 169th Brigade—had bombed down the Hindenburg Line to the Cojeul and handed over the captured trenches to the 89th Brigade. Meanwhile bombing attacks up the Wancourt—Feuchy

line had cleared it as far as the cross-roads west of Wancourt and captured 69 prisoners.

These bombing operations were fruitful and economical, but of no service to the division's left-hand neighbour, since no attempt was made to take Hill 90.¹ This made the task of the 14th Division very difficult, if not impossible. It will be recalled that the 41st Brigade held both of the Wancourt trenches on the left and one in the centre, while on the right no entrance had been effected. Visiting the 7/K.R.R.C. at 1 A.M., before receiving his orders, Br.-General Skinner agreed with Lieut.-Colonel C. H. Bury that, with Hill 90 untaken, it would be hopeless to attempt to move up the valley. He was, however, bidden to do so, though with the assurance that Hill 90 was also being attacked. He entrusted the operation to the 7/K.R.R.C. and 7/Rifle Brigade, and decided to withdraw the troops 200 yards from the portion of the trench which they held, so that the barrage could start from that line.

The attack had no chance of success. Fire from Hill 90 swept it in enfilade; the British barrage was ragged and frequently short, because adequate time had not been allowed for the transmission of orders. The two battalions did no more than reach their previous positions after heavy loss, especially in the 7/K.R.R.C.

On the right of the VI. Corps the simultaneous attack on Guémappe by the 76th Brigade of the 3rd Division likewise failed to reach its objective. The brigade advanced between the Cojeul and the Cambrai road, but encountered machine-gun fire both frontally from Guémappe and in enfilade up the valley from Wancourt, and was held up on about the line of the Wancourt—Monchy road. A second effort with increased field-artillery support—several fresh batteries having in the interval come into action in advanced positions—had no better fortune.

The 2nd Cavalry Division, which had orders to push through the infantry south of the Cambrai road as opportunity offered, had therefore once again no chance to act. The 5th Cavalry Brigade, south-east of Airy Corner and in close touch with the infantry, was heavily bombarded, suffering casualties in men and a far greater number to horses. The whole division was withdrawn in the evening to Wailly, south-east of Arras.

¹ Major-General Hull, after reporting that he could not take the hill during the night, had instructed the 167th Brigade to capture it as soon as possible.

The attack of the 3rd Division had been linked with that of the VII. Corps. The main operation of the VI. Corps was to be the capture of Monchy le Preux, as a first and vital step in an advance on Vis en Artois and Boiry Notre Dame. It was to be carried out at 5 A.M. by the 37th and 15th Divisions, the former being responsible for the village itself, and the latter for the front between its northern outskirts and the Scarpe. The 12th Division was in reserve. Difficulties of supply had been lessened by the opening of the Cambrai road up to Feuchy Chapel. The 37th Division, as well as the 3rd and 12th, could thus bring up rations and ammunition by wheeled transport, though the 15th was still using pack-horses for rations. The lack of another road to form a traffic circuit, however, made the rearward movement slow, and much hardship was inflicted on the wounded through delay in evacuating them.

Major-General Williams, commanding the 37th Division, directed the 111th Brigade to capture Monchy itself, while the 112th covered its right, wheeling to form a flank facing the valley of the Cojeul. The 63rd was to concentrate in the valley between Orangé Hill and the Monchy spur as soon as the 15th Division had advanced to the level of Monchy.

The barrage was late. The LXXI. Brigade R.F.A. of the 15th Division, hitherto supporting the 111th Brigade, had been returned to its own division, and the XV. Brigade R.H.A. (29th Division) which took its place appears to have been given insufficient time to make its arrangements. Messages had been sent postponing the hour of the assault, but they did not reach either the infantry or the tanks of C Battalion—only four out of the six of which managed to advance—in time. In consequence, the attack was disjointed and proceeded at an uneven pace.

The 11/L. North Lancashire on the left of the 112th Brigade, pushing on with great gallantry and determination, reached a line beyond the partly sunken road from Monchy to La Bergère. The 11/R. Warwickshire on the right, not being able to advance south of the Cambrai road, crossed to the north side and reinforced the left battalion. Seeing the right flank thus uncovered, a handful of men of the Loyals launched an attack against a trench running south-westward from La Bergère. A tank which came up at this critical moment enabled the survivors of this party to obtain a footing in the trench ; they then bombed some distance down it, killing 19 Germans, including seven

officers who suddenly emerged from a shelter. The 6/Bedfordshire was brought up from its position of the previous night south of the Cambrai road to reinforce the line north of the road.

The advance of the 111th Brigade was slow and was checked more than once. The tanks, however, kept down the fire of the hostile machine guns, in some cases even putting them out of action with their 6-pdr. guns, and eventually the 13/K.R.R.C. and 13/Rifle Brigade forced their way into Monchy, aided by troops of the 15th Division which had swung right-handed out of their own zone of advance.¹ The 13/Rifle Brigade had suffered heavily and had been broken up into small bodies. The remnants of this battalion were finally established in a trench on the north-west outskirts. About 150 prisoners were taken by the 37th Division.

The capture of Monchy le Preux was one of the outstanding feats of the whole battle. All the tanks taking part in it were put out of action, but it is doubtful whether Monchy would have fallen without their aid. It might not have been held or even completely cleared but for that of the cavalry.

The 3rd Cavalry Division was awaiting its opportunity. The leading brigades, the 6th (Br.-General A. E. W. Harman) and the 8th (Br.-General C. B. Bulkeley-Johnson), were just behind the Wancourt—Feuchy line north of the Cambrai road. Crossings over the trenches had been prepared, so that the cavalry could move forward quickly when the moment came. This was to be when the infantry reached La Bergère and Monchy. The brigades were then to advance on their own initiative, the first objective being a line across Hill 100, with a flank refused to face the Scarpe valley.

Between 7.15 and 8 A.M. information was received that La Bergère and Monchy had been taken. The early reports appeared premature, but the later were confirmed by the cavalry patrols.² At 8.30 A.M. three squadrons,

¹ The 10th/11th Highland L.I. (46th Brigade, 15th Division) claims to have entered Monchy in advance of the 111th Brigade and to have cleared it at least partially. This claim is to some extent supported by German accounts, which state that troops west of the village were still holding out when it was discovered that the British had entered Monchy and were in their rear.

² Again, the claim of the 10th/11th Highland L.I. and the German version seem to fit in with the earlier reports, which were, in sum, that British troops were in Monchy but that those facing the southern part were held up.

one of the 3rd Dragoon Guards from the 6th Brigade and one each of the Essex Yeomanry and 10th Hussars from the 8th, galloped forward, followed by the remainder of the three regiments.

The leading squadron of the 3rd Dragoon Guards, advancing with one troop extended and the other three in line of troop columns, reached its "first bound", the Monchy—La Bergère—Wancourt road, under heavy machine-gun fire from the direction of Guémappe, which rendered further progress impossible. It therefore dismounted and took up a fire position along the road. It was shortly afterwards joined by a second squadron, which dismounted on its right, filling a gap between the 112th and 111th Brigades.

The original intention had been that the 8th Cavalry Brigade should move north of Monchy. In view of the experience gained on the 10th April of the intense machine-gun fire from north of the Scarpe, Br.-General Bulkeley-Johnson had told the two regimental commanders that, if they encountered this fire again, they should move straight on Monchy. The leading Essex Yeomanry squadron did come under very heavy fire from the left, in addition to an artillery barrage. It therefore wheeled right and galloped into the north-western corner of the village, obtaining some cover from the trees and houses still standing. The Hussar squadron, seeing the Yeomanry wheel and divining the reason, bent its course southward to avoid the worst of the fire, and entered the village at the same moment, having suffered little loss. Both rode straight to the central square. From this point the Essex squadron followed the sunken road towards Pelves and that of the Hussars the road towards Pelves Mill and Rœux. The remnant of the garrison fled, but when the two squadrons attempted to emerge from the village, both were driven back into it by machine-gun fire.

When the remainder of the two regiments entered, the enemy opened on Monchy with every gun he could spare from the barrage he was now firing beyond it. His artillery had been strongly reinforced the previous evening, and the concentration of fire on the prominent village was such as few observers had ever witnessed. The high-explosive detonated with shattering effect on the paved main street and caused serious loss, especially to horses. Lieut.-Colonel P. E. Hardwick, commanding the 10th Hussars, led out a squadron in another attempt to make his way round north

of the village. Again, however, the fire was too hot to be endured, and he wheeled the squadron back through the park. He himself was wounded, and about the same time Br.-General Bulkeley-Johnson was killed on the Fampoux road. Lieut.-Colonel Lord Tweedmouth, commanding the Royal Horse Guards, took his place, but was not in communication with the troops in the village and was driven back by an artillery barrage when he attempted to reinforce with his regiment. Eventually a single squadron of the Royal Horse Guards was sent up. In Monchy the command thus devolved upon Lieut.-Colonel F. H. D. C. Whitmore, Essex Yeomanry.

It now became clear that in Monchy itself there was no more than a handful of the infantry which had so gallantly stormed it, and that what men remained were utterly worn out by continued exertion and strain. Most of such troops of the 15th Division as had entered had gone out again, to attempt to reach their own objectives. In the 37th Division, in addition to casualties, there had been some comprehensible and excusable straggling in the confusion of the advance, so that only small proportions of the various battalions had reached the positions described above. Moreover, there was scarcely an officer unwounded, with the result that men had taken refuge in cellars. The defence therefore fell almost entirely upon the cavalry, though there was one small party of infantry within the village and others on the flanks and at the château. The arrival of the cavalry, though it could not fulfil its original mission, was thus most opportune; for without it the Germans would have had the village almost at their mercy. The place was now consolidated, a matter of difficulty owing to the number of tool-pack-horses that had been killed. It was speedily further secured by the action of the 63rd Brigade and of the horse artillery of the 3rd Cavalry Division.

The 63rd Brigade was waiting in the western end of Lone Copse valley. At 8 A.M. a verbal message was received that troops of the 15th Division were at Pelves, whereupon the brigade was ordered to advance and occupy Hill 100, east of Monchy. This movement began at 10.30; but the 10/York & Lancaster was held up on the ridge north of the village by fire from the direction of Rœux. The battalion eventually occupied some old practice trenches on the forward slope. Br.-General Challenor then received an order to reinforce Monchy. The 4/Middlesex and 8/Lin-

colnshire moved forward by rushes of a dozen men at a time, keeping to the right of the York & Lancaster so as to avoid this fire. Posts of the Middlesex were established on the Rœux and Pelves roads, with the bulk of the battalion in reserve in cellars, while the Lincolnshire dug in on the right of the York & Lancaster.

The IV. Brigade R.H.A. was early in action. C and G Batteries were handled with extreme boldness, though without being able to accomplish any more than the field artillery brigades, which were in comparative safety on the western slopes of Orange Hill. G first of all advanced almost to the south-western outskirts of Monchy, but came under heavy fire and at 10.30 A.M. was ordered back by Lieut.-Colonel Lord Tweedmouth. One gun-team was destroyed, and that gun had to be left till nightfall. C brought two sections into action 700 yards south-west of Monchy and actually kept them there till 1.30 P.M., when Br.-General Harman ordered their withdrawal. From new positions on the western and south-western slopes of Orange Hill C and G, now joined by K, which had originally been attached to the 7th Cavalry Brigade in reserve, then put a protective barrage round Monchy, occasionally lifting to engage parties of Germans in the open. Each of the three batteries fired an average of 450 rounds that day. The LXVII. Heavy Artillery Group (two 60-pdr. batteries) which had been placed at the disposal of the Cavalry Corps, shelled Rœux and the exits from Boiry Notre Dame and early in the afternoon dispersed a battalion near the Bois du Sart.

Almost simultaneously it was decided to send back the horses of the two regiments in Monchy and of the 3rd Dragoon Guards outside it. Those of the Dragoon Guards moved just in time to escape heavy loss ; but the enemy's artillery caught the horses of the 8th Cavalry Brigade, killed and maimed many, and drove most of the remainder back out of control in a wild, panic-stricken gallop.

No counter-attack was actually launched against Monchy, though more than once the Germans were seen massing to the north-east as though in preparation for one.¹ About 2.30 P.M., however, there were signs that a counter-attack

¹ Lee.-Corporal H. Mugford, 8th Machine-Gun Squadron, brought effective fire to bear on these concentrations. Though severely wounded, he kept his gun in action in an exposed position and under constant fire. Later on, both his legs were broken by a shell, but even then it was some time before he would let himself be carried to a dressing-station. He was awarded the V.C.

was impending east of La Bergère. Receiving a report that the right flank was weak, Br.-General Harman sent up a dismounted squadron of the North Somerset Yeomanry and a machine-gun section to support it. The Yeomanry officers found the trench running south-west from the Cambrai road, the capture of which has been described, now held by 30 men of four different battalions, of whom Private Batchellor, 6/Bedfordshire, had taken command. Finding that his party had only about five rounds of ammunition apiece, he had equipped them with German rifles, for which there was ample ammunition, and collected a store of German bombs. It is reported that the counter-attack was broken up by fire; though, as German accounts state that it recovered some ground and took prisoners, it is possible that the enemy overran some advanced elements of the British attack whose presence was unknown to their own side. A second counter-attack after the fall of dusk was also defeated.

At 4 P.M. Major-General Williams ordered the 36th Brigade (12th Division), which had been put at his disposal, to secure Hill 100 and the spur running south from it. These orders, issued in the belief that Guémappe had fallen, were cancelled when it became clear that the place was still in German hands. For the time being there could be no question of a further advance, and the 36th and 37th Brigades were ordered to relieve the exhausted troops of the 37th Division and the cavalry. The relief, carried out in blinding snow-storms, could not be quite completed. The 8/Lincolnshire, 10/York & Lancaster, and detachments of the 8th Cavalry Brigade with Vickers and Hotchkiss guns remained until the night of the 12th, but Lieut.-Colonel Whitmore's remarkable command came to an end. It had included men not only of several battalions of the 37th Division, but also many small parties of the 15th, who afterwards reported that they had put themselves at the disposal of "the Colonel of the Essex Yeomanry".

Monchy le Preux, almost undamaged a few days before and with the majority of its houses intact when the attack was launched that morning, was now a ruined charnel-house, its street choked with dead horses piled amid the rubble. By next morning, however, its death and desolation were cloaked in a pall of white.

The 15th Division was heavily handicapped by the fact that the right of the XVII. Corps did not move. The 46th Brigade on the right had only one battalion, the 10th/

11th Highland L.I., in front line. This battalion inclined considerably to the right, partly because it was elbowed south by the troops of the 45th Brigade on its left and partly because of the natural tendency to swing round to face machine guns firing from Monchy. Its two leading companies actually passed south of the village, and endeavoured to advance in the direction of Boiry, but were speedily held up by heavy fire. The rear companies entered the village and cleared a number of houses. They then appear to have been led out to the north in order to make for their original objective, but were checked by machine-gun fire and finally dug in on the left of the 10/York & Lancaster. The 7th/8th K.O.S.B., which moved in support, states that it finally held a line from north of Monchy to Lone Copse Valley; if so, it overlapped at least two other battalions. In accounts of this confused battle such incidents are on several occasions recorded and may well have occurred. A company of the 12/Highland L.I. moved right round the north side of Monchy and afterwards sent in parties of men from the north-east, which assisted to clear the village.

The 45th Brigade attacked with the 6/Cameron Highlanders on the right and 6th/7th R. Scots Fusiliers on the left. Intense machine-gun fire from the left bank of the Scarpe caused a similar inclination to the right—almost, in some cases, a right wheel—and portions of two battalions of this brigade also entered Monchy. There is no doubt that the false reports of the capture of Pelves were due to the statements of returning wounded that “our men “were entering the village”, the village, in fact, being Monchy. Learning that the advance had everywhere come to a halt, Major-General McCracken ordered the 44th Brigade to go through at 11 A.M. and occupy the Monchy—Pelves ridge. Little further progress was, however, made until 6 P.M. About that hour the 8/Gordon Highlanders of this brigade advanced under cover of a snow-shower to the level of Lone Copse, but finding both its flanks in air withdrew to the Monchy—Fampoux road.

The 17th Division (Major-General P. R. Robertson), hitherto forming part of the Cavalry Corps and destined for the rôle of exploitation, was now handed over to the VI. Corps and was ordered to relieve the 15th Division that night. The 50th Brigade moved up to take over the line, but owing to traffic blocks and falls of snow it was unable to do so till shortly before dawn. It then established itself

approximately on the line of the Monchy—Fampoux road, as it seemed impossible to take over all the short lengths of trench and fortified shell-holes east of the road which had been occupied by parties from various battalions when their advance came to an end. In consequence, the line north-west of Monchy was actually in rear of that reached by the 63rd Brigade on the 10th. The small success on the front of the VII. Corps and the capture of Monchy le Preux were the sole fruits of the day's operations south of the Scarpe. They represented no adequate reward for the sacrifices made to attain them, though the fall of Monchy was to have a certain effect on the future course of the battle.

THE FIGHTING NORTH OF THE SCARPE 11TH APRIL

On the evening of the 10th Lieut.-General Fergusson Maps 3,
6, 7.
Sketch
10. had ordered the 4th Division to advance on the morrow and establish a line through Plouvain, Greenland Hill and the inn on the Rœux—Gavrelle road, bending back thence to Hyderabad Redoubt. The events of the day had made it clear that there was no hope of cavalry being able to operate here unless the infantry broke through the enemy's new position first. Major-General Lambton decided to attack at 12 noon. The hour was clearly left to his decision, but General Allenby subsequently expressed dissatisfaction that the 4th Division had not moved earlier.¹ The 51st Division was to make yet another attempt to secure the portion of the Point du Jour line still in the enemy's hands, but as the wire was still insufficiently cut this attack was postponed until 6.30 p.m. Major-General Nicholson, commanding the 34th Division in the centre, directed that patrols should go out to discover whether the enemy was holding the Fampoux—Bailleul road; if the 4th Division's attack succeeded, this was to be occupied. Consequently, no infantry action of any importance took place before noon on the front of the XVII. Corps.

Major-General Lambton's decision not to attack until noon can be attributed mainly to the experience of the previous day. He desired that a six-hour bombardment of the château, the Chemical Works, the station, and other

¹ Appendix 45 shows that Third Army orders did not definitely lay down that the XVII. Corps should attack at 5 a.m., the hour fixed for the VII. and VI.

known strong points should precede the attack. He arranged this with the XVII. Corps Heavy Artillery, but unfortunately, owing to bad visibility, the fire was not very effective. He also had to assemble the 10th Brigade in the sunken Fampoux—Gavrelle road, and as this brigade did not know the ground, decided that the movement must be carried out by daylight. The delay also gave him an accession of strength in field artillery. Actually, he had on the morning of the 11th four field artillery brigades within effective range instead of two as on the previous morning.¹ Before noon on the 11th the L. Brigade also moved forward, to positions in the Scarpe valley east of Athies. He was therefore now comparatively well provided with guns, but had ammunition only for a barrage of short duration.

All three infantry brigades took part in the attack, but the rôle of the 11th was mainly to form a flank from the inn to Hyderabad Redoubt. The 12th Brigade on the right, which had as its first objective the village of Rœux, the cemetery, and the château south of the Chemical Works, was allotted for assembly the ground south of the Fampoux—Plouvain road. The front of the division was a very cramped one on which to form up, being less than 1,500 yards long, whereas the first objective, from the Scarpe at Rœux to the inn, measured nearly twice as much. The right, the 1/King's Own with two companies of the 2/Lancashire Fusiliers, had, moreover, to follow a circuitous route in order to avoid the marshes on the river-bank. In consequence, the barrage was lost and the attack broke down. The 2/Duke of Wellington's, on the left, captured a trench with some fifty prisoners, but on mounting the railway embankment came under heavy fire from Mount Pleasant Wood and was held up. The sole result was the occupation of the original Green Line; but the casualties were not exceptionally heavy, being less than three hundred.

The assembly of the 10th Brigade (Br.-General C. Gosling) in the Fampoux—Gavrelle road and Hyderabad Redoubt was observed by German aeroplanes and heavily shelled. The attack, across more open ground than that of the 12th Brigade, suffered far more loss without achieving any greater success. It was pressed with extraordinary gallantry and determination by the two first-line battalions, the 1/R. Irish Fusiliers and 2/Seaforth Highlanders, which went forward regardless of withering fire from the château, the Chemical Works, the station, and the embankment.

¹ See p. 256 f.n.

One party of the Fusiliers got to within two hundred yards of the station, and the better part of a company of the Seaforths, led by Lieutenant D. Mackintosh, reached a trench just west of the first objective, the Rœux—Gavrelle road.¹ Isolated and having run out of ammunition and bombs, both attempted to withdraw, but for the most part were shot down. The second-line battalions, the Household Battalion² and 1/R. Warwickshire, came under fire so heavy that they did not progress even as far as the troops through which they were to have passed. At 2 P.M. Major-General Lambton telephoned that another attempt must be made to reach at least the first objective; but owing to heavy losses and the confusion into which the troops had been thrown Br.-General Gosling had no time to organize this. The total casualties in the brigade were over one thousand, those of the Seaforth Highlanders being 12 officers and 363 other ranks out of 12 officers and 420 other ranks who went into action. A long line of Highlanders could be seen lying where the machine guns had caught them. Owing to the repulse of this brigade, the attack of the 11th could not be pushed home, and the position finally occupied corresponded closely with the original Green Line, being slightly in advance of it on the Fampoux—Plouvain road.

Nor had the 1st Cavalry Brigade any opportunity to act; indeed, owing to the intensity of the shelling only a single squadron of the leading regiment, the 2nd Dragoon Guards (Queen's Bays), even entered Fampoux. At 6 P.M. Major-General Mullens withdrew the brigade to Athies.

During the early afternoon patrols and forward-observing officers reported that in front of the 101st Brigade, on the right of the 34th Division, there were no signs of the enemy for 1,200 yards east of the Green Line. The Germans were working on the Oppy—Méricourt line and even more busily on a switch linking this line at Gavrelle to the Point du Jour line at Bailleul. The division then pushed forward its posts, especially on the right, where the 101st

¹ Lieut. Mackintosh, mortally wounded and missing, received the posthumous award of the V.C. Before reaching the trench he had been shot through the leg. He then inspired his men to drive back a counter-attack, in the course of which he was wounded a second time. Though now unable to stand, he crawled out into the open to encourage the troops to continue the advance, and was then hit for the third time.

² The Household Battalion was formed in the autumn of 1916 from the reserve regiments of the Household Cavalry, 1st and 2nd Life Guards and Royal Horse Guards.

Brigade occupied the long communication trench which ran back to Gavrelle almost up to the point where the St. Laurent—Gavrelle and Fampoux—Bailleul roads crossed. Here the 1/East Lancashire of the 4th Division established touch with it.

The 51st Division's projected attack was not required. The Brown Line trenches had been evacuated and were occupied by the 154th Brigade in the evening. That night the 2nd Division of the XIII. Corps relieved the 51st. The XIII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir W. N. Congreve) took over the front north of the point where the Lens railway crossed the Point du Jour line. This front passed to the First Army, that of the Third being thus reduced by 2,000 yards.

A landmark in the battle had been reached. The infantry engaged on the 11th was the same as that which had attacked on the 9th ; now the relief of several divisions as exhausted as the 51st was impending. The hope of employing the cavalry on a large scale to exploit the early success had also been abandoned, partly owing to the experience of the 11th April, partly owing to the indifferent news which came in that night from the Fifth Army, but chiefly because of the condition of the three cavalry divisions themselves.

Contrary to a prevalent belief, the battle casualties of the cavalry had not been high—except in the 8th Cavalry Brigade—even among the horses. The total losses of the 3rd Cavalry Division, by far the heaviest sufferer of the three, were 41 officers and 553 other ranks, with a low proportion of killed to wounded. Those of its 8th Cavalry Brigade were 30 officers and 367 other ranks, and of the 6th 11 officers and 175 other ranks. Next came the 5th Brigade of the 2nd Division, the casualties of which were 11 officers and 103 other ranks.¹ The casualties among horses were higher. For example, the 5th Cavalry Brigade had 347 killed, wounded, and missing ; and in the 8th Cavalry Brigade, whose losses in this respect are not recorded, 600 remounts were afterwards drawn.

Yet it was the elements rather than the enemy which had virtually put the cavalry horses out of action for the time being, except in the brigades which had never moved out of reserve. Hard work on heavy ground, long exposure to wet and cold, and in some cases shortage of forage and

¹ The total cavalry casualties in the Third Army for the month of April, including those of corps cavalry, were 59 officers and 786 other ranks.

water, after having been under cover most of the winter, had played havoc with them. In the 2nd Cavalry Division 274 horses died from exhaustion or had to be destroyed. That figure in itself indicated that a great proportion of the horses in the division and probably nearly all in the 5th Brigade were perilously near the point of foundering, and that the loss would be immense if they were not rested. That night, therefore, General Allenby ordered the three divisions to withdraw to the areas which they had occupied on the night of the 8th April. After allowing them a short rest he moved them still further back on the 16th. They were now out of touch with the battle. On the 18th, however, by direction of Sir Douglas Haig, he ordered Lieut.-General Kavanagh to quarter two brigades within 36 hours' march of the front line.

The total casualties of the Third Army to the 11th April were reported to be 8,238.¹ If we add those of the First Army the figure is approximately 13,000. As has been stated, there were the same number of divisions in first line as on the first day of the Battles of the Somme. Now, the casualties of that day, the 1st July 1916, were, in round numbers, 57,000, that is, over four times as many as those of the first three days of the Battles of Arras. These figures are indeed illuminating as regards the improvement in armament and methods, though they reflect also the bad organization of this particular German Army and also suggest a decline in the enemy's power of resistance in general. The captures of the Third Army were over 7,000 prisoners and 112 guns.² So far, then, the Army, in addition to its important territorial gains, had inflicted upon the enemy losses very much greater than it had itself suffered. Unfortunately, the Army casualty list was to continue on the same scale of between two and three thousand a day, so that by the end of April the total was to exceed 50,000; whereas, on the other hand, the captures of ground and of prisoners never again approached those of the first stage of the battle.

Although hopes of further considerable success had

¹	Killed	Wounded	Missing
Officers . . .	189	553	21
Other Ranks . . .	900	5,712	863

There may be a slight lag in the reporting of the casualties by the higher formations, but it is not sufficient to affect the significance of the comparison with the Somme.

² The number of prisoners captured is given by the three corps as 7,587 up to the 12th. Very few prisoners can have been captured on that day.

by no means been abandoned, there was now no longer question of pursuing a defeated enemy. Owing to the very bad visibility and intermittent snow of the 10th April, the Royal Flying Corps had missed the great movement of a line of fresh German divisions moving up to replace those which had been overrun and in some cases almost destroyed as fighting formations. On that day, however, the *18th Division* had been identified at Fampoux, and on the 11th prisoners of the *3rd Bavarian Division* had been captured at Monchy le Preux. As there were known to be several other German divisions in rest behind Crown Prince Rupprecht's Army Group, it might be deduced that the enemy would shortly complete the relief of all his exhausted troops on the battle front. On the other hand, it had been discovered that south of the Scarpe all the wireless stations had been withdrawn behind the Drocourt—Quéant Switch. On that and other evidence G.H.Q. still thought it possible that, under continued pressure, the enemy would withdraw fighting to this line of defence.

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 9TH, 10TH AND 11TH APRIL ¹

On the right of the British attack on the 9th April stood the German *18th Reserve Division*. It faced the left brigade of the 21st Division—the only brigade of that division which took part in the original attack—the 30th Division and the right brigade of the 56th Division.

This was the most fortunate of the German divisions. Its main defences were the two trenches of the strong Hindenburg or Siegfried system, though its third trench, the *Artillerieschutzstellung*, was shallow and without shelters. All three regiments were in line, each having two battalions in the three trenches mentioned, and the third in reserve.

On the German left the *84th Reserve Regiment* lost a portion of the Hindenburg Line on the afternoon of the 9th April, but, as recorded, recovered it by a counter-attack next evening. The *86th Reserve Regiment*, in the centre, repulsed the attack of the 30th Division. It was only the *31st Reserve Regiment*, on the right, which suffered seriously in the attack of the 9th. Its right turned by the fall of Neuville Vitasse, it formed a flank facing north in a communication trench south of and parallel to the Neuville—Wancourt road. On the 10th April it was ordered to withdraw to a new line running about a thousand yards north-west of Wancourt and Guénappe; but the troops in the salient immediately south of Neuville were nearly all mopped up by the bombers of the 56th

¹ Authorities as for previous chapter, and in addition histories of the *31st, 75th, 85th, 86th, 89th, 119th and 125th Regiments*.

Division. Early on the 10th, a battalion of the *121st Reserve Regiment* was placed at the disposal of the *18th Reserve Division*. This battalion belonged to the *26th Reserve Division*, which had just been relieved at Bullecourt. All the remainder of the division had gone back to rest areas, but this unit happened to be still on the platform at Cagnicourt awaiting a train, and was marched north into the battle. Later in the day two battalions of the *26th Division*, one of the so-called "counter-attack divisions", were added as a reserve.

The *18th Reserve Division* was driven back but never really broken, as were those further north. It was left in action until the 14th April, and its casualties were not very high: according to its own account, 62 officers and 1,702 other ranks.

The *17th Reserve Division* held from Neuville Vitasse to Tilloy lez Mofflaines, its left flank resting on the Neuville—Wancourt road. It therefore had to meet the attack of the left of the 56th Division, the 14th Division, and the 3rd.

The *163rd Regiment*, on the left, had three companies annihilated at Neuville Vitasse. On the evening of the 9th April it repulsed the British attack against the Wancourt—Feuchy line, between the Arras—Cambrai and Neuville—Wancourt roads. On the morning of the 10th, however, news came that the *11th Division* had retired from this line further north. The divisional commander, General von Reuter, therefore ordered a withdrawal to the half-prepared Monchy village position. Screened by a snow-storm, the 350 survivors of the *163rd Regiment* fell back. They joined two companies of the centre regiment, the *162nd*, in the sunken Monchy—Guémappe road, north of the point where it crossed the Cambrai road. The reserve battalion of the *162nd* was placed on the Monchy—Rœux road, facing west and north-west, and commanding the Scarpe valley. It was the remnants of these two regiments that held up the advance of the 37th Division on the 10th April.

In the course of that afternoon the first reinforcements appeared. A battalion of the *3rd Bavarian Division*, which had been hurried south from the Lille district, was first seen advancing in artillery formation from Boiry Notre Dame. Then, more welcome still—for the divisional artillery had almost ceased to exist—the artillery of the new division crossed the open ground at a gallop and unlimbered behind Monchy. "There was a great arc of our batteries on a wide "front behind our endangered positions. It was a most memorable "and magnificent battle picture, lit by the evening sun." It also foreboded the very hot reception met by the great British attack of the following morning. The right regiment of the division, the *76th Reserve*, may be said to have lost its two leading battalions on the 9th April, though only after a long defence of Tilloy lez Mofflaines. Its reserve battalion held up the attack of the 3rd Division on the Wancourt—Feuchy line in the evening, falling back to Monchy on the 10th. This battalion must also have suffered severely; for it was relieved that night in the defence of Monchy by the reinforcing battalion, whose advance has been described, *I./17th Bavarian* of the *3rd Bavarian Division*.

The *17th Reserve Division* lost 79 officers and 2,700 other ranks from the 9th to the 11th April.

The *11th Division*, with its right just north of the Scarpe, was attacked on the 9th April by the 12th and 15th Divisions and the

right wing of the 9th. There is little to be said of the left regiment, the 38th, as its leading battalions were destroyed, and its reserve battalion was put in north of the Scarpe. The 51st Regiment, in the centre overrun in the foremost trenches, crowned its mishaps by evacuating the Wancourt—Feuchy line on the morning of the 10th, on the order of a staff officer given without the approval of the divisional commander. It fell back to the new Monchy—Rœux line, and was relieved in front of Pelves by the III./125th Regiment of the 26th Division, the arrival of which has been mentioned. The right regiment, the 10th Grenadiers, lay astride the Scarpe, and, contrary to the general practice, had two battalions in line. The support companies of these battalions made a prolonged and gallant defence of the railway embankment on the 9th, but had very few survivors. The reserve battalion, with that of the 38th Regiment just mentioned, held a front from Rœux station to the Scarpe, and was responsible for the repulse of the 4th Division's attempted advance from Fampoux. A battalion of the 51st Regiment, which had been in rest behind its division, the 220th, just outside the southern flank of the battlefield, was put at the disposal of the 10th Grenadiers. The latter regiment was relieved by the 119th of the 26th Division before dawn on the 10th April.

The 11th Division suffered heavily. It records the loss of 105 officers and 3,154 other ranks in two days' fighting, out of which, according to the British Intelligence service, 2,200 were captured.

The three divisions whose fortunes have been outlined belonged to the IX. Corps, or Group Arras. The next, the 14th Bavarian, formed part of the I. Bavarian Reserve Corps, or Group Vimy. This division held the front from St. Laurent to opposite Roclincourt, and thus had to meet the attack of the 9th and 34th Divisions, and of the 4th Division, which passed through the former. This is the division singled out by Ludendorff, by clear implication, as having "failed". It should in fairness be said that it had received the worst of the gas bombardment, which seems to have affected its morale, in addition to the actual casualties caused. Its losses are not given, but it is known that the British took 2,800 prisoners from it. If, therefore, its ratio of prisoners to total casualties was similar to that of its neighbour, the 11th, its losses in two days would be over 4,000.

The remnants of the left and centre regiments, the 8th and 25th Bavarian, fell back, the former on the afternoon of the 9th April, the latter at dawn on the 10th, to the Gavrelle—Rœux road. Here the 31st Regiment, the first regiment of the 18th Division, the counter-attack division in that sector, began to arrive on the evening of the 9th and to relieve the two Bavarian regiments. The right regiment, the 4th Bavarian, likewise lost practically the whole of its two leading battalions. It also was relieved by the 31st Regiment. The divisional commander, General von Rauchenberger, had attempted to use the reserve battalions of the three Bavarian regiments in a combined counter-attack, but this came to nothing.

Lastly, the 1st Bavarian Reserve Division, in line from east of Roclincourt to the Neuville St. Vaast—Thélus road, had its left wing facing the British 51st Division, the right being opposite the Canadian Corps. The 2nd Bavarian Reserve Regiment, on the left, did fairly well on the first day, holding up the advance of the 51st Division in the Point du Jour line. On the morning of the 10th,

however, the British attack forced it back to the outskirts of Bailleul. Here it was relieved that night by the *75th Regiment* of the *18th Division*. The *1st Bavarian Reserve Regiment* suffered very heavily indeed, and eventually a remnant of 150 of all ranks found themselves in the Point du Jour line, with right on the Bailleul—Thélus road. After dusk there appeared on its right flank *III./21st Bavarian Regiment*. This belonged to the *5th Bavarian Division*, in line west of Lille, and was one of the series of battalions sent down from this area to Vimy Ridge. The Lille—Arras railway lay conveniently for a movement of this sort, and these battalions, coming from a considerable distance, arrived, in general, more quickly than the *Sixth Army's* own reserves. They were railed back as soon as possible to their indispensable posts in reserve. On the evening of the 10th April what was left of the *1st Bavarian Reserve Regiment* withdrew to the railway and was there relieved by the *89th Grenadiers, 17th Division*, another of the counter-attack divisions.

The *1st Bavarian Reserve Division* reports a loss of 112 officers and 3,021 other ranks; but it is probable that something like two-thirds of these casualties were inflicted by the Canadian Corps.

The reader who has followed these details will note with what difficulty the new front was constituted. Apart from the local reserves, the resting battalions of each regiment in line, the reinforcements come under three, perhaps even four, categories. There were, first, the counter-attack divisions—the *Sixth Army* reserve—which made no serious attempt on the British Third Army front to fulfil their function, but were used as they came up to plug breaches and relieve the survivors of the front-line divisions. There was the *3rd Bavarian Division*, from the north, which formed part of the general reserve at the disposal of O.H.L. There was a battalion from the *220th Division* in reserve on the flank of the battle, and a battalion brought down from Lille. Detachments of all these types were flung hurriedly into the battle-line, to be attached to divisions holding the front when the latter were still in a state to continue the struggle, and to relieve them as quickly as possible when they were not. The least mauled troops of the original front-line divisions were left in for a longer period than those which had suffered severely, and fought on intermingled with the fresh troops. It was fortunate for the Germans that the attack became almost as disorganized as the defence, and gave the latter time to steady itself, to consolidate new or half-prepared positions, and to put its system of ammunition supply into order.

On the morning of the 11th April, the German line from the right of the British attack to the Third Army's left at Farbus Wood was held as follows:—

Old front line S.E. Neuville—Vitasse

From

<p><i>18th Res. Divn.</i></p>	<p><i>84th Res. Regt.</i> <i>86th Res. Regt.</i> <i>II./31st Res. Regt.</i> <i>III./121st Res. Regt.</i> <i>III./31st Res. Regt.</i> <i>I./84th Res. Regt.</i></p>	<p>} In original position in Hindenburg Line. (26th Res. Divn.)</p>
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To

Cambrai Road

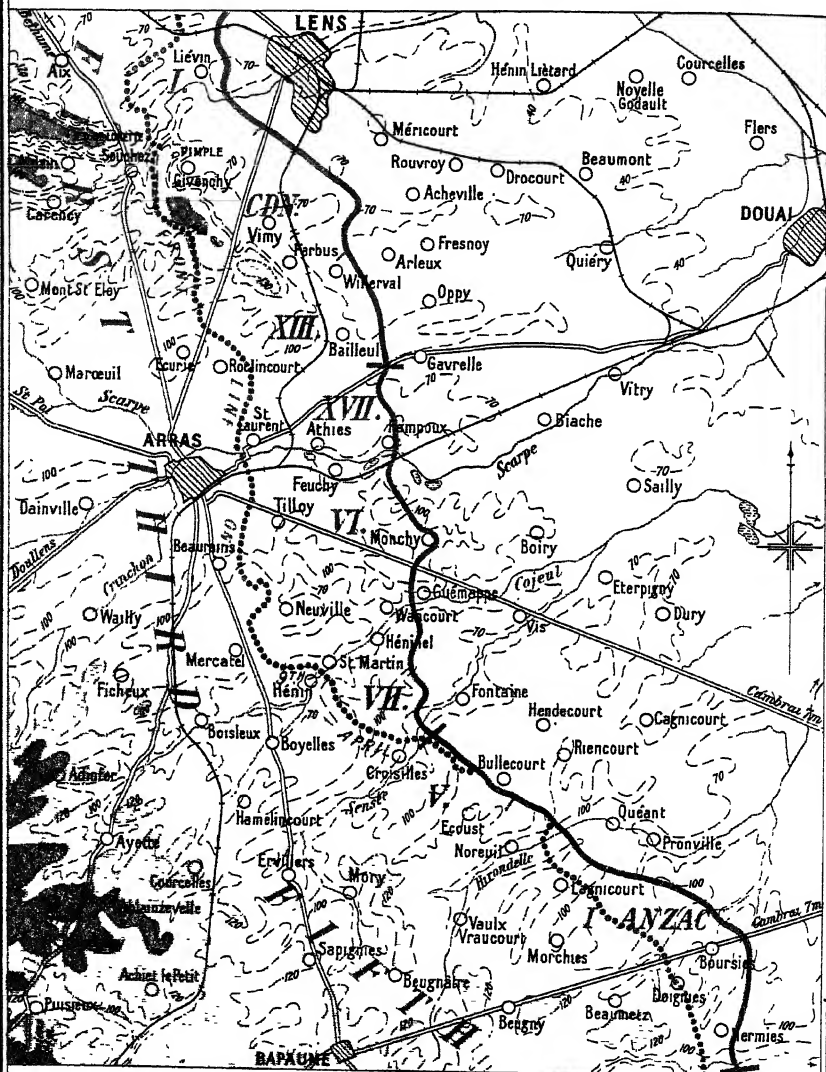
From	<i>17th Res. Divn.</i>	<i>163rd Regt.</i> <i>I./17th Bav. Regt. (3rd Bav. Divn.)</i> <i>1 Coy. 163rd Regt.</i> <i>III./162nd Regt.</i>
To	..... Lone Copse	
From	<i>26th Divn.</i>	<i>III./125th Regt.</i> <i>I./119th Regt.</i>
To	..... Arras—Douai Railway	
From	<i>18th Divn.</i>	<i>31st Regt.</i> <i>III./85th Regt.</i> <i>86th Regt.</i>
To	..... Bailleul—Fampoux Road	
From	<i>17th Divn.</i>	<i>89th Regt.</i> <i>75th Regt.</i> <i>III./21st Bav. Regt. (5th Bav. Divn.)</i>
To	..... Farbus Wood	

It will be seen that the units were still somewhat intermingled on the fronts of the two southernmost divisions, which had remained in, but that north of Lone Copse, where three counter-attack divisions had taken over, there was in line only a single battalion of another formation. It will also be noted how strong was the defence astride the Scarpe, that is, between Lone Copse and the Arras—Douai Railway. The *26th Division* held a front of little more than 1,500 yards and had seven out of its nine battalions in reserve. The artillery of the new divisions had also come up and the heavy artillery had been strongly reinforced.

Little need be said of the fighting on the 11th April except as regards the capture of Monchy le Preux and the attack on Rœux. In the former case the newly arrived and fresh battalion of the *17th Bavarian Regiment* was completely broken. It had come up after dusk the previous night and had therefore not seen the ground which it had to defend. The enemy's accounts pay tribute to the gallantry of the 10th Brigade's attack on the Chemical Works. The *31st Regiment's* front opposite Hyderabad Redoubt was broken, but the position was restored by a counter-attack. The allusion is obviously to the great feat of Lieutenant Mackintosh's company of the 2/Seaforth Highlanders.

Sketch 12.

ARRAS, 1917: 14TH APRIL.



Line on 14th April

Scale
Mile 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Miles
Heights in metres
140 120 100 80 60 40 20 0

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CHAPTER X

THE BATTLES OF ARRAS 1917 : THE FIRST BATTLE OF THE SCARPE (*concluded*)

12TH-14TH APRIL

(Maps 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 ; Sketches 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14)

THE EVENTS OF THE 12TH APRIL

THE 11th April has already been described as the last day on which exploitation on a grand scale of the victory won at Arras was attempted. Before the results of the day's fighting were known, Sir Douglas Haig received General des Vallières, Chief of the French Military Mission, who was going to French G.Q.G., and gave him a message which summed up his programme in the phrase "no change—objective Cambrai". The Third Army would first attempt to join hands with the Fifth Army, which had penetrated the Hindenburg Line that morning between Quéant and Bullecourt—unfortunately, as it proved, only for a few hours—and then, with left flank on the Sensée marshes, advance in the direction of Cambrai, its right flank covered by the Fifth and its left by the First Army. Maps 3,
4.
Sketch
8.

Except for the local success at Monchy le Preux, the operations of the 11th had been most unsatisfactory. Almost all the original divisions were becoming exhausted ; the cavalry was temporarily out of action, even supposing that in present conditions it were of any value ; and losses had been considerable. The objective might still be Cambrai, but it seemed more distant now. When Sir Douglas Haig reached St. Pol on the 12th General Allenby was out, but his chief General Staff officer, Major-General L. J. Bols, stated that the Army commander considered new methods necessary to meet a new situation. On Tuesday the 10th any risks were justifiable ; now the enemy

had reinforced his fighting line, brought up fresh artillery to replace that destroyed and captured, and found time to prepare the Drocourt—Quéant Line for defence. The advance must therefore, in General Allenby's view, become more methodical and deliberate, and an attempt must be made as far as possible to "substitute shells for infantry".

On the evening of the 11th G.H.Q. had telegraphed permission for the transfer of four fresh divisions to the corps engaged south of the Scarpe. The 33rd and 50th were to pass to the VII. Corps, the 14th and 30th taking their places in the XVIII. Corps in reserve; the 17th Division from the Cavalry Corps and the 29th from the XVIII. Corps were allotted to the VI. Corps, the 12th and 37th Divisions being handed over to the XVIII. Corps.¹

This message is worthy of comment. The XVIII. Corps, with its three divisions, the 29th, 33rd and 50th, was nominally Third Army reserve, and the Cavalry Corps, with the 17th Division attached, formed part of the Third Army. Yet General Allenby could not put these divisions into the line without permission from G.H.Q. From the Third Army's point of view it was as if the commander of a brigade had been unable to use a company held in reserve without reference to the commander of his division, a situation almost impossible to conceive. From the point of view of G.H.Q., however, the two cases were by no means parallel. G.H.Q. was compelled to keep its hands upon every reserve division in the force and to dictate its movements and employment, because the division was the mobile fighting formation of all arms and because the reserve of divisions was, as ever, barely adequate to meet requirements.

General Allenby's orders for the 12th differed markedly from those issued for the preceding day. They began with the statement that the pressure on the enemy must be continued in order to prevent him from consolidating his present position. But not only were the objectives more limited—the front Croisilles, Fontaine, Chérisy, Vis en Artois, Pelves, Rœux Station and the Chemical Works—it was also laid down that the first operations were to be the capture of the high ground east of Wancourt by the VII. Corps on the right, and the capture of Rœux Station by

¹ The 17th Division was handed over complete with artillery. The artillery had been withdrawn from the 34th Division on the afternoon of the 9th and had formed up in column at Arras with a view to accompanying the 17th Division in support of the cavalry (see p. 231). The artillery of the other three reserve divisions had been in action since the beginning.

the XVII. Corps north of the Scarpe. These steps would, it was hoped, enable the flanks of the VI. Corps in the centre to progress. Until they had been carried out, the rôle of that corps was merely to assist its neighbours by artillery fire.¹

The immediate objective of the VII. Corps was still the original Green Line. Major-General Campbell, commanding the 21st Division on the right, had been directed by Lieut.-General Snow not to renew his attack until he was satisfied that the preparation was complete. He had intended to put his troops in movement in the afternoon. Actually, no attack was required; for that morning the 12/Northumberland Fusiliers (62nd Brigade) found the Hindenburg Line on its front abandoned. Under the pressure of a fine bombing attack by the 18/Manchester of the 30th Division, which crossed the Cojeul under a barrage of rifle grenades and Lewis-gun fire, the enemy evacuated about a thousand yards of the Hindenburg Line comprising the objective of the 21st Division. In the magnificent dug-outs were found a number of wounded men of the 64th Brigade, captured in the enemy's counter-attack on the evening of the 10th April. The Germans had treated them well, finally giving them hot coffee at 7.30 A.M., an hour or so before they began their withdrawal. Later on, the 12/Northumberland Fusiliers extended the gains by bombing for two or three hundred yards. After the 18/Manchester had handed over the captured trenches, the 30th Division was no longer in contact with the enemy, having been pinched out by the divisions on either flank. It was replaced in the VII. Corps by the 33rd Division, which became corps reserve.

The progress of the VII. Corps did not by any means end with this success. On the previous evening it had appeared that the enemy was abandoning the long-disputed Hill 90. This was quickly occupied, and bombing parties of the 169th Brigade (56th Division) thrust their way down two newly-dug communication trenches towards Héninel. At 5.35 A.M. officers of the 2/London saw the Germans leaving the village in large numbers, and it was occupied after very slight resistance. Wancourt, too, was found to be held only by a few snipers and was entered by patrols both of the 169th Brigade and of its left-hand neighbour, the 41st of the 14th Division. The 169th Brigade then established itself on the high ground beyond the Cojeul, its

¹ These telegraphic orders are given in Appendix 46.

left slightly to the south-west of "Wancourt Tower", an old windmill which had been converted by the enemy into an invaluable observation post. The 41st Brigade, however, did not succeed in coming up into line on the left, mainly owing to the exhaustion of the troops, which was increased by their exertions in crossing the Cojeul valley, deep in sticky mud. The brigade established a front from Héninel Cemetery to the Cojeul at the south-west corner of Wancourt. Here it was relieved in the course of the night by the 151st Brigade of the 50th Division, which took over from the 14th. For the VII. Corps it had been a satisfactory day, which had seen the enemy forced to abandon his salient bridgehead over the Cojeul as a result of pressure on the flanks.

Map 5.
Sketch
9.

On the front of the VI. Corps the 3rd Division did not move. Still blocked in front of Guémappe, it was not to attack again until the Wancourt ridge was completely occupied. The 17th Division, which had relieved the 15th during the previous night, had made preparations to co-operate with the attack on Rœux by establishing itself on the ridge from Monchy to the neighbourhood of Pelves Mill. Br.-General C. Yatman, commanding the 50th Brigade, decided that if he waited for news of the progress north of the Scarpe his own advance would come too late to be of any help, and that his best course would therefore be to begin it an hour after the launch of the 9th Division's attack north of the river. Just as the troops were beginning to go forward, word came that the 9th Division had failed. The enemy's outposts fled in front of the 6/Dorsetshire, but the battalion had to be stopped and afterwards withdrawn, as the slopes south of the Scarpe were completely exposed to fire from Rœux.

The task of the XVII. Corps was to take Rœux and the Chemical Works. Lieut.-General Fergusson had asked overnight that, in order to give time for reconnaissance, the operation should be delayed until the 13th. He had been told that the attack must be made "as soon as corps commander considers it can be carried out with reasonable chances of success", and had thereupon fixed 5 P.M. as the hour. He ordered the 9th Division to attack through the 4th. Major-General Lukin decided to attack the station and the road between it and the inn, as the first objective, with the South African and 27th Brigades, screening their flank with a smoke barrage south of the railway. Then the 26th Brigade would attack the Chemical Works, Mount

Pleasant Wood, and the village of Rœux. Though the troops had not been engaged since the 9th April, they had suffered severely from cold, wet, exposure and lack of hot food, especially in the South African Brigade. Many of the men in this brigade had to be lifted to their feet and rubbed by their comrades that morning before they could stand.

Maps 3,
6.
Sketch
10

The attack failed completely, with heavy loss. The South African Brigade, assembling in Fampoux, was shelled so violently that it could not start close behind the field-artillery barrage, which moved at the rate of 100 yards in two minutes. Once the barrage had run away from it, it stood no chance of success. Br.-General Maxwell, commanding the 27th Brigade, had at first intended to march his brigade into Fampoux and then up the valley running north from the eastern edge of the village, in order to form up behind the line held by the 4th Division. After a personal reconnaissance he changed his mind, because the approach was in view of the Chemical Works and had been heavily bombarded on the appearance of even his small party. He now decided to form up in the trenches of the Oppy—Méricourt line. This entailed an advance of nearly a mile down the slope in extended order. Br.-General Maxwell asked for a smoke barrage to cover the movement, but it was found impossible to arrange this in time. The line held by the 4th Division was reached without heavy loss, but, as in the case of the South African Brigade, the men could not keep up with the barrage. The left progressed about two hundred yards, the right rather less. After dusk all elements of the 9th Division in advance of the line of the 4th were brought back to it, and, when the troops of that division had been withdrawn, were relieved by the 26th Brigade. The 4th Division continued to hold the front from Hyderabad Redoubt to the junction with the 34th Division.

The operation, like some others in the course of the battle, had revealed that it is one thing to plan and organize when there is plenty of time, but that in modern war it is often quite another matter when there is time only for hurried improvisation, carried out by largely amateur staffs. The heavy artillery fire was ineffective. The station buildings remained intact, though there had been the best part of the day to deal with them; and Br.-General Maxwell reported that while he was watching the engagement he saw only a single shell fall near the Chemical Works. Heavy and siege batteries were in some cases on

the move forward ; in others they had not been able to move ; and at least one battery had moved but could get no ammunition owing to the state of the roads and the congestion of the traffic.¹ So far as can be discovered from the records, what firing there was by the heavy artillery was directed against Rœux and the cemetery, though the station and Chemical Works were the danger point as regards the first phase of the attack. Again, the operation orders of the 9th Division took some six hours to reach the South African Brigade, though the latter was not in the line and its headquarters was situated no further forward than Athies. When the 1/South African Infantry reached Fampoux it discovered that the troops of the 4th Division had not been informed that there was to be an attack.

There was no sign of improvement in the weather. Snow fell intermittently in the morning and early afternoon, and from about 4 P.M. until dusk it came down steadily. The trenches were deeper than ever in liquid mud, and the lot of the infantry, great numbers of whom had no other shelter, was more than ever miserable. In the 34th Division two men died of exposure.

THE EVENTS OF THE 13TH APRIL

General Allenby ordered the advance to be continued on the 13th on the lines of his order of the previous night, except that the XVII. Corps was now to stand fast and that the VI., while moving on Vis en Artois, was to form a flank facing the Scarpe valley on the ridge between Monchy le Preux and Boiry Notre Dame. The Army commander had thus, apparently, given up hope that the XVII. Corps should clear the way for an advance of the VI. The opposition to the XVII. had proved so strong that he now directed the VI. to depend upon itself, regardless of its neighbour north of the Scarpe. The sole objective was now the line of the Sensée. If that were reached, it appeared probable that the enemy's position in the Hindenburg Line at Bullecourt, where the Fifth Army had been repulsed, would become untenable, and that the two Armies would have fruitful opportunities for co-operation.² Lieut.-

¹ Artillery on railway mountings was unavoidably out of action, because the railway was not ready to carry it. The LV. Heavy Artillery Group of 12-inch and 15-inch howitzers did not fire a round between the 10th and 28th April.

² These telegraphic orders are given in Appendix 47.

General Snow ordered the 21st Division on the right to advance down the ridge towards Fontaine les Croisilles, clearing the Hindenburg Line as it moved: the 50th, on the left, to make good the high ground south of the Cojeul and then push on eastward; and the 56th Division in the centre to move in the direction of Chérisy, taking advantage of the progress made by the divisions on its flanks. He had been informed by Lieut.-General Haldane that the 3rd Division on the right of the VI. Corps would advance through Guémappe as soon as the 50th had made good its objective.

Map 8.
Sketch
12.

The attack of the 21st Division, the headquarters of which had moved forward to Boyelles, was in part a bombing operation down the Hindenburg Line and in part an advance across the open on either side of it. The right of the division was to keep just south of the wire, and the left was directed on the north-west corner of Fontaine Wood. Two tanks were to co-operate with the 62nd Brigade, but both broke down early. Actually no advance was made in the open, but the bombers of the 12/North-umberland Fusiliers made a little progress along the two Hindenburg trenches. About noon, Lieut.-General Snow informed his divisional commanders that in consequence of the postponement of the VI. Corps' attack, it was unnecessary to press the advance to the line of the Sensée that day. The 56th Division made no movement.

The 50th Division (Major-General P. S. Wilkinson) had relieved the 14th in difficult circumstances, while the latter was in the act of surrounding Wancourt and crossing the Cojeul. Br.-General N. J. G. Cameron, commanding the 151st Brigade, pushed forward the 9/Durham L.I., with orders to establish itself from Wancourt Tower northward to the Cojeul. It did reach a point a little north of the tower, but heavy and accurate machine-gun fire up the valley prevented progress on the left.

The VI. Corps was to have carried out a large-scale attack, the first objective extending from the Cojeul a thousand yards beyond Guémappe, across Hill 100 east of Monchy, to Keeling Copse and Pelves; the second, St. Rohart Factory, the Bois du Sart, and the spur east and south-east of Pelves. The third—which, probably, it was hardly expected to reach that day—was Vis en Artois, Boiry Notre Dame, and the road running north from that village to Biache St. Vaast. If the flank divisions, the 3rd and 17th, were unable to make progress, owing to the VII.

and XVII. Corps on either hand not doing so, the 29th Division, after relieving the 12th in the centre, was to capture its share of the first objective, the high ground east of Monchy, the other two divisions keeping touch with it in order to secure its flanks.

At 4.55 P.M. on the 12th April, however, a message was received from the commander of the 29th Division, Major-General Sir B. De Lisle, that his troops had been seriously delayed on their way up, owing to the roads being blocked by the cavalry in its withdrawal. The leading brigade had actually reached Arras before 1 P.M. but the second was only arriving when the message was sent, and it was clear that the Cambrai road, east of Arras, was as congested as those west of the town. He therefore urged that the attack should be postponed.

In view of the difficulties of reconnaissance and communication this request was not merely reasonable but indeed necessary. It is, however, of interest to turn aside for a moment in order to note how greatly the processes and paraphernalia of trench warfare, especially the artillery and machine-gun barrages, had slowed down preparation and movement. If Napoleon, perhaps even if Roberts—under whom the commander of the 29th Division had served—had had a brigade six miles from the fighting-line, the distance from Arras to Monchy, at 1 P.M., they would have expected it to intervene in the battle that evening if necessary. The suggestion that it could not carry out an attack next day they would have dismissed as ludicrous. Yet, as we have said, Major-General De Lisle's request was in accordance with the dictates of prudence, founded upon experience of modern fire-power.

It was granted by Lieut.-General Haldane. He postponed the attack until the 14th and ordered the 29th Division, in addition to relieving the 12th that night, to relieve the 3rd on the night of the 13th April. After the attack on the 14th the 17th Division would take over to the crest of the Monchy—Boiry spur and the corps front would be held by only two divisions.

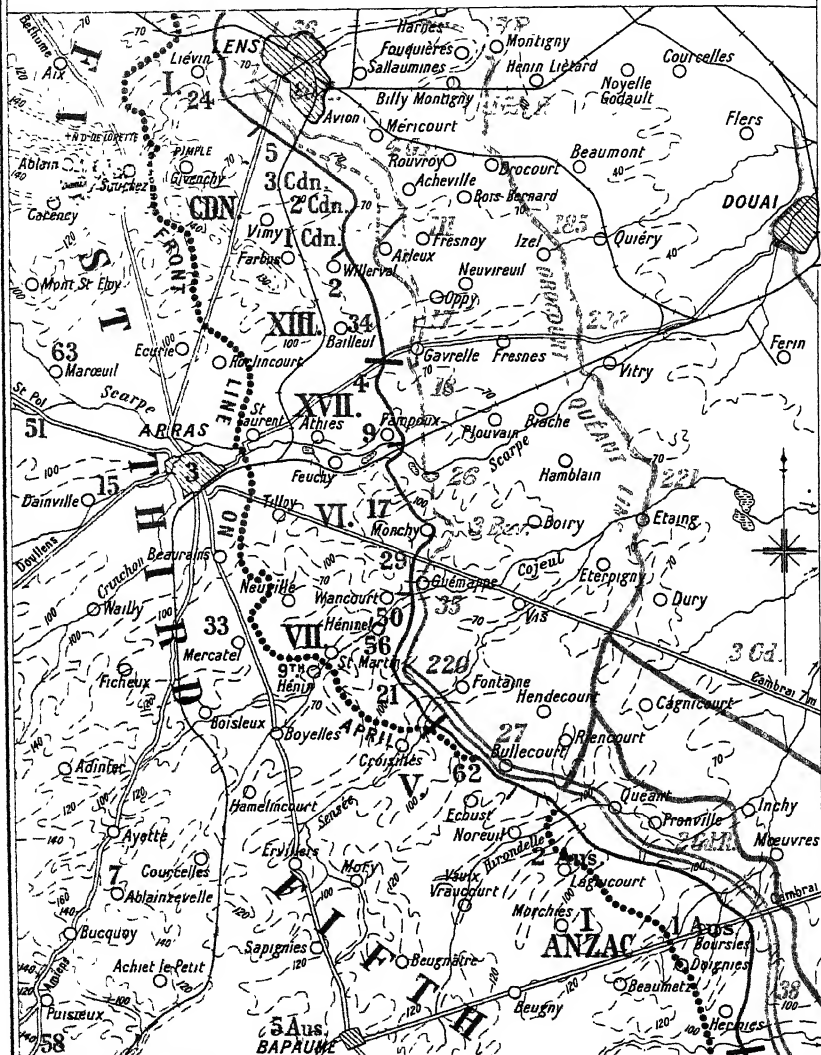
The VI. Corps had therefore no operation to carry out on the 13th. Late in the evening, however, the 3rd Division was drawn into an attack which had formed no part of the corps commander's plans.

Major-General Wilkinson, commanding the 50th Division, had been impressed by the impossibility of silencing the machine guns firing up the Cojeul valley.

Sketch 13.

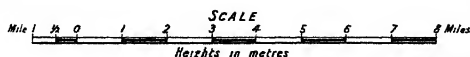
ARRAS, 1917

Situation, 14th April.



British Line 14th April

Germans Green.



Ordnance Survey 1939

Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

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Having been slightly wounded in the leg, so that he had difficulty in walking, he requested the commander of the 3rd Division, Major-General Deverell, to visit him at the headquarters of the 151st Brigade. There he told him that the 50th Division could not advance next day unless Guémappe were taken. According to Major-General Deverell's impression, Major-General Wilkinson offered to assist an attack upon this place by the 3rd Division that evening not only with his two available brigades of artillery but by the simultaneous advance of his infantry north and east of Wancourt Tower to clear the spur overlooking Guémappe. Major-General Deverell, though his division had had a very hard time and was awaiting relief that night, agreed, subject to the approval of his corps commander. This was given, and he was informed that the VI. Corps' heavy artillery would bombard Guémappe from 6 to 6.45 P.M. It was arranged that the 18-pdrs. of the 3rd Division should provide a creeping barrage for the attack of the 9th Brigade, while the howitzers barraged the ground in front of the 50th Division south of the Cojeul; the 50th Division artillery was to lay a barrage west of Guémappe and subsequently lift to the valley north-east of it.

There was apparently a misapprehension as to the exact position of the foremost troops of the 50th Division and also a misunderstanding concerning the action which it was to take. The 151st Brigade, which had very little room to manœuvre, did despatch two more companies up the slope to prolong the line northward from the neighbourhood of Wancourt Tower, but they failed to do so. On the 3rd Division's front the 9th Brigade duly attacked with two battalions, the 1/Northumberland Fusiliers and 12/West Yorkshire. They at once came under devastating fire from front and right flank, and Br.-General Potter, seeing no signs of co-operation on the part of the 50th Division and that Germans entrenched near Wancourt Tower were actually standing up in the open to fire across the valley, broke off the attack. The brigade suffered 313 casualties. In the course of the night it was relieved by the 87th Brigade of the 29th Division.

The morning was quiet on the front of the XVII. Corps. In the afternoon, however, news came that the enemy had made an important withdrawal opposite the First Army. Influenced in part by the successes of this Army at the Pimple and the Bois en Hache, on either

side of the Souchez river, on the 12th April, the Germans fell back under cover of small rear guards from the ground immediately commanded by Vimy Ridge. Bailleul, Willerval, Vimy, Givenchy en Gohelle were occupied that day by the British, and during the night the 2nd Division, on the right of the XIII. Corps, established posts on Hill 70, 1,200 yards east of Willerval. The 34th Division thereupon pushed forward posts to the Bailleul—Fampoux road, to hold the portion of it north of the Arras—Gavrelle road hitherto in possession of the enemy. Patrols went out to the Oppy—Méricourt line opposite Gavrelle, finding it strongly held. It was evident that the enemy now meant to stand upon this line.

The weather had improved slightly, though there was some rain and snow. For the first time in the course of the battle the R.F.C. had been able to do a full day's flying and had renewed its bombing of dépôts, aerodromes and railheads.

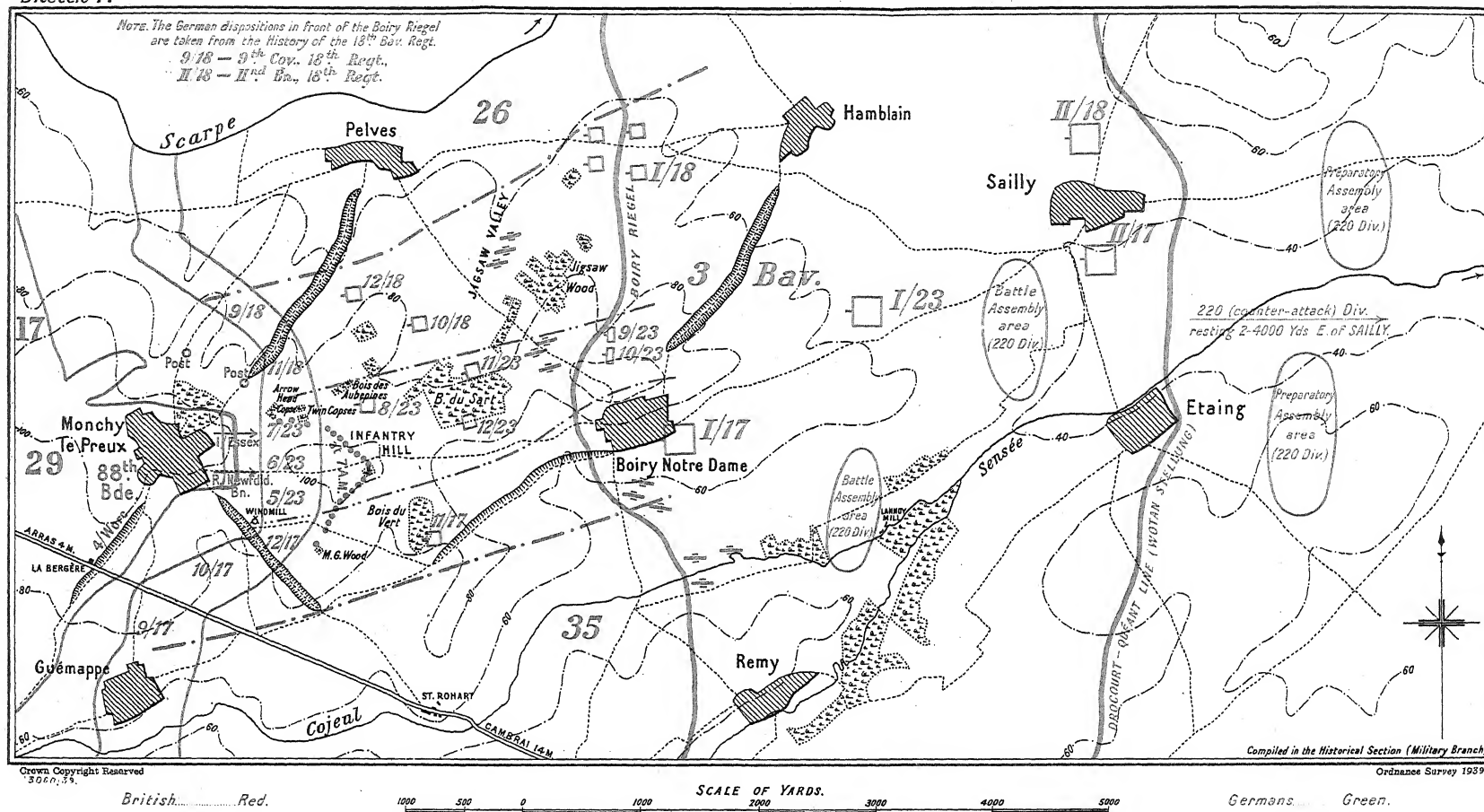
THE EVENTS OF THE 14TH APRIL

On the 14th the XVII. Corps was still not called upon to attack. The objectives of the VII. and VI. were, first, the Fontaine—St. Martin road where it crossed the Hindenburg Line, the enclosures on the Cambrai road half a mile north-east of Guémappe, Hill 100 east of Monchy, and thence along the spur to the right of the XVII. Corps; and, second, Chérisy, St. Rohart Factory on the Cambrai road, and the Bois du Sart. If this latter objective were attained, the third was to be a series of bridgeheads over the Sensée south of the Cambrai road and the village of Boiry Notre Dame north of it. The boundary between the two corps was the Cambrai road, except that Guémappe, to the south of it, and Vis en Artois, astride of it, were the objectives of the VI. Corps.¹

Lieut.-Generals Snow and Haldane arranged to attack simultaneously, under a creeping barrage, at 5.30 A.M. That of the VII. Corps was to move at the slow rate of 100 yards in four minutes and to rest for 36 minutes beyond the first objective before moving on to the second. From Zero to 6.30 A.M. 8-inch and 9.2-inch howitzers were to bombard Fontaine and Chérisy, while 60-pdrs. searched the approaches; there was also to be a special 6-inch howitzer barrage from 5.20 to 6.8 A.M.

¹ The telegraphic order of the Third Army is given in Appendix 48.

Sketch 14



During the night of the 18th the 19th Brigade (Br.-General C. R. G. Mayne) of the 88rd Division relieved the 64th Brigade, to carry out the attack on the 21st Division front under the orders of Major-General Campbell. Its orders were to reach the sunken Croisilles—Chérisy road from just south of the Hindenburg Line to the north-west corner of Fontaine Wood. Consequently, the attack was, as before, partly a bombing operation and partly a movement across the open. In the Hindenburg Line the bombers of the 1/Cameronians made only about 150 yards in the first trench and 100 yards in the second.¹ On the left, the 5th/6th Scottish Rifles, starting from a line in rear of that of the bombing parties, advanced nearly half a mile, but, with its left flank uncovered, failed to reach the crest of the ridge half-way between the Cojeul and the Sensée, and suffered over two hundred casualties in the attempt.

Map 8.
Sketch
13.

Once again there was an absence of co-ordination between the left of the VII. Corps on the south bank of the Cojeul and the right of the VI. Corps facing Guémappe. On the previous day the 3rd Division had delivered an abortive attack on Guémappe with very little support from the 50th Division on its right. Now, the 29th Division reported, that its right brigade—the 87th (Br.-General C. H. T. Lucas)—which had relieved the 3rd Division in front of Guémappe during the night, had been allowed no time to organize an attack and could not undertake one at Zero. The village was therefore to be kept under bombardment while the 88th Brigade attacked Hill 100. The consequences were unfortunate for the 56th and 50th Divisions south of the Cojeul. The 169th Brigade (56th Division) advancing with its left on Wancourt Tower—which had collapsed or been demolished by the enemy during the night and was no longer a very prominent landmark—made very slight progress at the cost of fearful casualties. The 1/9th London Regiment (Queen Victoria's Rifles) was, in fact, almost annihilated by machine-gun fire followed by a determined counter-attack. The 151st Brigade (50th Division) accomplished even less. Learning that Guémappe was not to be attacked that morning, Br.-General Cameron

¹ It is difficult to give the exact progress made in the Hindenburg Line on the 12th, 13th and 14th respectively, because the bombing parties reported their positions as being further forward than they really were. It was believed on the evening of the 14th that the front Hindenburg trench had been captured up to the point where the St. Martin—Fontaine road crossed it; actually, the line reached was about that of the Héninel—Croisilles road, half a mile further back.

decided to assemble his troops along the valley between Wancourt and Héninel Cemetery and to advance on a very narrow front, hugging the left of the 56th Division and keeping as far away as possible from the river in order to avoid the fire from Guémappe. This plan failed to achieve the desired result. There was apparently misapprehension as to the boundary-line between the two divisions, and the upshot was that the battalions which were pushed forward in succession bore right-handed into the area of the 56th until there was extreme confusion, with portions of at least half a dozen battalions intermingled in a small space south of Wancourt Tower. One party of the 6/Durham L.I., advancing with great gallantry, reached a point some six hundred yards east of the tower, but no survivors returned to tell the story. At the end of the day the situation was practically unchanged, except that the German practice trenches 1,500 yards east of Héninel were now occupied.

As already explained, the 29th Division did not attack Guémappe, but its left brigade, the 88th (Br.-General D. E. Cayley), carried out its projected operation against Hill 100. The brigade was disposed with the 4/Worcestershire extended from La Bergère to the south-east corner of Monchy; the 1/Royal Newfoundland and 1/Essex, which were to carry out the attack, in a newly-dug assembly trench roughly three hundred yards east of the village; and the 2/Hampshire in reserve on Orange Hill, with three platoons in cellars in Monchy. The field artillery available to support the advance consisted of that of the 8rd, 12th, 17th and 29th Divisions. The objective was the forward slope of Hill 100. Strong points were to be established to cover the flanks, and when the protective barrage had lifted the two battalions were to push out patrols to discover if the series of woods known as the Bois du Vert, Bois du Sart, Bois des Aubépines and Keeling Copse were occupied by the enemy and to seize them if they were not. Hill 100 afforded an excellent observation post to whichever side held it, and its capture was therefore very desirable. It is not to be supposed, however, that, the sixth day of the battle having been reached, the saving of 24 hours was vital. Yet rather than wait one day, the little force was to advance "into the blue", unsupported on the flanks, against a position which when captured would form a salient, and hold it against probable counter-attack by incalculable numbers. Incidentally, no troops were detailed

to occupy the positions vacated by the attacking battalions when they moved forward.

So far as can be ascertained the whole objective was captured, the enemy withdrawing hurriedly. Shortly afterwards, however, a counter-attack, of which there was but a brief warning owing to the cover afforded by the woods, swept over the two battalions and overwhelmed them. Little knots here and there held out for a brief space, but were surrounded and either killed or forced to surrender, while the survivors, attempting to fall back, were mown down.¹

At 10.10 A.M. Lieut.-Colonel J. Forbes-Robertson, commanding the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, who had received reports of the disaster from excited or wounded survivors, sent forward his signal officer to reconnoitre. The latter returned twenty-five minutes later to say that there was not a single unwounded man on the eastern edge of the village and that he had seen two to three hundred Germans a few hundred yards away. Lieut.-Colonel Forbes-Robertson, after sending off his adjutant to report and ask for reinforcements, at once led out his headquarters personnel, about twenty strong.

The little party went up the street under heavy shelling, which brought at least one comfort, evidence that as yet the enemy was unlikely to be in the village. The last big house had a shell-hole in the wall against which a ladder had been placed and from this the commanding officer reconnoitred the position. What he saw was a line of Germans in the act of jumping into the assembly trench dug for the attack. Between him and them, one hundred yards away, was a low bank topped by the remains of a hedge. He determined to occupy this position, and led his party at the double across the open in its direction. A machine gun from the left opened fire, and there were numerous casualties; but the commanding officer, the signal officer, six other ranks of his own regiment, and one Essex private whom he had picked up, reached their objective, and found that there was a trench under the bank.²

¹ For the German action see Note at end of Chapter.

² The party consisted of the commanding officer, Lieut. K. J. Keegan (signal officer), Sergeant J. R. Waterfield (provost sergeant), Corporal C. Parsons (signal corporal), Lee.-Corporal W. Pitcher (provost corporal), Privates D. W. Curran and J. Hounsell (signallers), Private A. S. Rose (regimental messenger), and Private V. M. Parsons (1/Essex). An hour and a half later Corporal J. Hellier (orderly room corporal), who had been knocked out by a shell-burst, and had fallen into a shell-hole, crawled in.

With a series of bursts of rapid fire, the party first of all drove the Germans to cover, killing a considerable number of them. After that, in order to husband ammunition, only exceptional targets within 300 yards range were engaged. The enemy was completely pinned to his ground, and various small parties which sought to reinforce his line were shot down. Until about 2.45 P.M., when a platoon of the 2/Hampshire appeared among the eastern houses, these ten men represented all that stood directly between the Germans and Monchy, one of the most vital positions on the whole battlefield, and still containing wounded men who had been in the cellars since the 11th April. The 2/Hampshire had been warned of the counter-attack by Lieut.-Colonel Forbes-Robertson's adjutant, and had advanced without knowing whether or not Monchy had fallen. It was held up outside the village by a heavy barrage of "five-nines" until the commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel A. T. Beckwith, observed that the shells were bursting in two parallel lines, only slightly overlapping. The troops then made their way through the gap and entered the village with slight loss. Reinforcements having arrived, Lieut.-Colonel Forbes-Robertson and his men were relieved at 8 P.M., about which time the enemy abandoned the assembly trench.¹

The defence of Monchy had been aided by the 4/Worcestershire, which threw back its left flank and raked the advancing Germans with its fire. The artillery, ranged by observers on the spur south-west of the village, also appeared to do a great deal of execution amid the woodlands, and the enemy undoubtedly suffered severely. The casualties of the Essex and Newfoundland battalions were, however, overwhelming, practically the whole fighting strength of both having disappeared.²

The posts of the 50th Brigade (17th Division) on the roads to Pelves Mill and Pelves about two hundred yards north and north-east of Monchy park, also did good service, firing with great effect into the flank of one section of the German counter-attack, which moved south-west

¹ It is of interest to note that, though Lieut.-Colonel Forbes-Robertson was not awarded the Victoria Cross on this occasion, he won it the following year.

² They were as follows :—

	Killed		Wounded		Missing		Total	
	Off.	O.R.	Off.	O.R.	Off.	O.R.	Off.	O.R.
1/Essex . . .	1	2	7	108	9	475	17	585
1/Newf. . .	—	18	7	132	10	318	17	468

from Keeling Copse. At one moment it was thought these posts had been driven in, but they contrived to hold their ground.

At 4.30 P.M. the bombardment of Monchy was intensified, and two large forces of Germans issued from the Bois du Sart and Bois du Vert. Both came under the fire of the British artillery, especially of the heavy, and fell back.

Only nine prisoners were captured, but the information obtained from them was interesting. They belonged to the *3rd Bavarian Division*, which had been brought down from the north after the British attack on the 9th April. The morning counter-attack had been an impromptu affair; but a far bigger one, with the object of recapturing Monchy, had been planned for that afternoon. This accounted for the second advance from the woods. What the Germans had accomplished was to recover the ground won by the two British battalions that morning and to cut those battalions to pieces. The opportunity to retake Monchy they had thrown away, and, in fact, the front remained exactly as it had been. The paralysis which overcame the first wave of these excellent Bavarian troops would be astounding if it could not be paralleled from the records of both sides.

North of the Scarpe the enemy's artillery bombarded the 9th and 4th Divisions with gas shell. The 34th Division, less artillery, engineers and pioneers, was relieved that night by the 63rd (R.N.) Division. This was one of the divisions which had been held in reserve behind the First Army Front, under the orders of the XIII. Corps. The headquarters of that corps had, as has been stated, already entered the line.

The relief had come none too soon. On the previous evening Major-General Nicholson had received a report from his Assistant Director of Medical Services that virtually all the troops were suffering from exposure, dangerously exhausted, and unfit for any further exertion. The relief was well carried out, all the battalions that could safely be withdrawn having been moved back in time to be embussed that evening at the Porte Baudimont, the north-western gate of Arras. They were served with soup and tea laced with rum before entering their buses, which were to carry them straight to back-area billets; and their cheering drowned the din of the traffic as the column set off down the St. Pol road.

It may be mentioned at this point that the arrange-

ments for moving divisions to and from the battlefield were extremely efficient from first to last. On the other hand, billeting and sanitation in Arras had lapsed into confusion and neglect. So urgent had these problems become that it was decided to withdraw the senior Administrative Staff officer of a reserve corps from his duties to act as Town Commandant. Br.-General A. J. G. Moir, D.A. & Q.M.G. XIX. Corps, appointed to this post on the 16th April, speedily put affairs straight. He remained in Arras until the end of May.

The 14th had been the finest day since the beginning of the battle, with a bitterly cold wind but comparatively dry. It would, however, take many dry days to enable the engineers to catch up to a schedule of road reconstruction in which the exceptionally bad weather had caused them to lose ground. It must also be recognized that the Third Army had actually started in arrears from this point of view, and that even before the attack was launched it was struggling with its road communications. In the course of his inspections south-west of Arras between the 2nd and 6th April, Br.-General J. A. Tanner, Chief Engineer of the VII. Corps, noted that one road was "nearly gone", part of another was "completely gone", and that a section of a third was "on the point of breaking up". This state of affairs, the causes of which have been fully explained, was unavoidable, or could have been avoided only by curtailing the carriage of ammunition.

Nor must it be forgotten that after the offensive had begun the Third Army could devote only a proportion of the engineers, pioneers and labour units to the vital work most directly connected with the advance, that is, the repair and extension of roads and railways and, in a lesser degree on this front, the repair or construction of bridges. In practically every division at least one field company was continuously employed in the consolidation of captured positions, reversing German trenches, constructing strong points, and wiring. The search for "booby traps" and the clearance of captured dug-outs to provide shelter for headquarters and as many troops as possible were lesser but still important tasks. The energies of the Army Troops companies were largely devoted to water supply: laying of pipes, reopening of wells, installation of pumps and tanks, and provision of troughing for horses.

It had always been apparent that the road work, as in the Battles of the Somme, would be difficult, but the

exceptionally wet weather had made it a heart-breaking task. There was, in fact, a vicious circle. The state of the roads in the neighbourhood of the railheads prevented the transport of sufficient road metal, and further forward the shortage of road metal delayed the repair of roads. About 30 per cent. of the available lorries were under repair during the first few days of the offensive. The old expedient of using the bricks of demolished villages as road metal was once more employed ; but, although a fair foundation can be made with broken brick, the surface will not last, and the maintenance of roads repaired in this manner became doubly arduous. On the St. Nicholas—Bailleul road there was no village, and this had to be largely corduroyed. So far as can be discovered, no other slab or plank roads were laid during this stage of the battle, and, as we have seen, the supply of timber accumulated for the purpose had been small. Inadequate traffic control increased the difficulties. Doubtless, the necessary traffic was beyond the capacity of the roads, but it appears that sterner measures might have been taken to prohibit the movement of vehicles for any purposes other than those essential to the operations.

The opening of Arras Station as railhead for supplies and coal on the 15th April helped to ease the situation. On the previous day the Douai line had been repaired as far as the Triangle. On the 12th Boisieux au Mont, on the Amiens—Achiet le Grand—Arras line, was opened as supply railhead for the two right-hand divisions of the VII. Corps—a little prematurely, as it turned out, since lorries could not approach the station during the first two days. Eventually this step proved of value. Though continuous pressure upon the enemy had been maintained since the opening of the battle, the advance of artillery, especially of medium calibres, which might have given individual attacks a better chance of success, and the supply of artillery ammunition, had on occasion been delayed by the congestion of the roads. The cavalry had greatly contributed to this congestion during the first three days of the battle, but one of the chief causes had been broken-down vehicles.

Good organization of pack transport had ensured that the troops did not go short of food or small arms ammunition. Yet pack transport could only be a makeshift, which it was desirable to abandon as soon as possible, on account of its limited carrying-power. Some administrative staffs

made more of their resources than others in these circumstances. Instances occurred of one division receiving fresh meat while its neighbour subsisted on preserved meat, which naturally caused discontent in the ranks of the less fortunate.

This is perhaps to look only on the darker side and to forget the hard work successfully done both by those who planned and those who executed, work, measured by mile-hours, exceeding anything hitherto accomplished. In weather of the type of five Aprils out of six, the difficulties would have been lighter and would have been overcome earlier. As it was, the pause before the next offensive sufficed to restore the situation.

Yet the repair of the roads was only one factor, though of vital importance. In warfare of the type which had developed during the past two years on the Western Front, the preparation for the battle had assumed an importance equal to that of the conduct of the battle once engaged. In the minds of some commanders and staff officers it had, perhaps, assumed an even greater importance, inclining them to the belief that control was almost an impossibility after action was joined, and that when they had toiled at their tasks for weeks or it might be months, their power to influence the decision was almost at an end.

Be this as it may, the contrast of the period of preparation and of the first assault with that of attempted exploitation was glaring. To take one instance, the heavy artillery in the former phases had been overwhelming in effect. The German artillery was almost silenced, and the most impressive pictures are painted by German historians of the scenes of destruction which the battery positions presented. In subsequent operations the problem was admittedly more difficult. No longer was it an easy matter to identify the hostile heavy artillery or to engage it even when identified. The German heavy howitzers had been withdrawn to a distance from which they could reach the British front-line system, yet were almost immune from the fire of their counterparts on the British side. The remedy was the six-inch gun, the scourge of the heavy howitzer, but there were only 24 of these on the Army front. The counter-battery reports, founded on "O.Ks." and "explosions" signalled by young aircraft observers, often with an inadequate view of their targets, were absurdly optimistic, and the eagerness with which they were known to be studied by high commanders did not tend to

check their exuberance. Yet apart from this, the action of the heavy artillery was often unsatisfactory. Several infantry brigadiers complained strongly of lack of liaison, and one divisional headquarters contrived only just in time to stop a projected bombardment partly directed against trenches held by its own troops.

The infantry, which fought with such skill in the assault, so long as its tactics were those largely learnt by heart, began to hesitate and grope when they had to be rapidly adapted to the needs of the moment. This subject will be considered more fully later on, but it is necessary at this stage to touch upon it. In brief, the atmosphere of siege warfare hung about the British Army when it passed to open or semi-open warfare, and it was by no means only the rank and file or junior officers who were still affected by it.

The first phase of the Battles of Arras, known officially for the Third Army front as the First Battle of the Scarpe and for that of the First Army as the Battle of Vimy Ridge, was at an end. The offensive had resulted in the capture of far more ground, exceptionally strongly fortified, and many more prisoners than any hitherto launched by the British on the Western Front. Yet it was beginning to assume a painfully familiar air. The attacker could almost always win ground in the first rush, but previous experience showed that after this stage the gains became smaller and more costly. Sir Douglas Haig was not prepared, however, to admit that this situation had yet arisen, perhaps partly because he was not satisfied that there had been adequate co-ordination of the recent attacks. In any case there could be no question of terminating the offensive, owing to his commitments to General Nivelle. For the next operation, to be carried out after a pause of several days by the Fifth, Third and First Armies in concert, he intended to draw up the plan himself.

NOTE

THE GERMANS ON THE 12TH, 13TH AND 14TH APRIL ¹

On the evening of the 11th April *Group Arras* decided to evacuate the wedge-shaped bridgehead over the Cojeul held by the 84th and

¹ In addition to authorities already mentioned histories of the 17th Bavarian and 18th Bavarian Regiments have been consulted.

Sketch
14.

86th Reserve Regiments of the 18th Reserve Division. These regiments were in danger of being cut off, and were hard-pressed in their withdrawal across the Cojeul in the early hours of the 12th, the British advanced guards getting among them in the darkness. The new line, known as the "Guémappe-Riegel", had been hastily dug, but it ran across the commanding Wancourt ridge. On the night of the 18th April the *18th Reserve Division* was relieved by the *35th*, one of the divisions from O.H.L. reserve.

North of the Cambrai road the *3rd Bavarian Division* completed the relief of the *17th Reserve Division* on the night of the 11th, placing two regiments in line. On the evening of the 12th the division was instructed to extend its left to the northern outskirts of Guémappe. The third regiment was then brought up, and the front was held from north to south by the *18th*, *23rd* and *17th Bavarian Regiments*.

The German reports of the fighting at Monchy on the 14th April are far from being reliable. They speak of a general British attack, supported by tanks, whereas actually only two British battalions attacked and there were no tanks engaged; but the accounts are interesting as regards the methods of defence. The *23rd Bavarian Regiment*, in the centre, was broken by a "mass of British troops" from Monchy (*i.e.* the leading waves of two battalions). The extreme left of the *18th Bavarian Regiment* swung back and took the advance in enfilade. It thereupon came to a halt, but supports "pouring out of Monchy" (which could only be the rear waves of the same two battalions) carried it forward to some 500 yards behind the original Bavarian line. The *23rd Bavarian Regiment*, however, claims to have given way "elastically", so that the 1/R. Newfoundland and 1/Essex were caught in a trap. This movement on the part of the Germans may have been in large degree involuntary, but it represents the first recorded instance of the tactics of General Ludendorff's original scheme for the defensive battle. The system of fortified localities, which had been forced upon him by his critics, had superseded these tactics in the early stages of the battle, but here that system had been abandoned, not to reappear during the remainder of the Arras fighting.

The experienced German battalion and company commanders did not require orders. The reserve battalion of the *23rd Bavarian Regiment* pushed straight forward from the rear position on which it was working. The left of the *18th*, assisted by survivors of the right battalion of the *23rd*, formed a barrier between Monchy and the unfortunate British troops east of it. A battalion of the *17th Bavarian Regiment* from Boiry moved up on the British right and joined hands with further surviving companies of the "elastic" *23rd*. Counter-attacked from three sides, 150 British surrendered, but the majority tried to get back to Monchy. That was an impossibility, and the Germans shot them down at their leisure. The force held up by Lieut.-Colonel Forbes-Robertson in front of Monchy was reduced to 60 men. It waited for reinforcements, but these, owing to the destruction of telephone wires, never appeared.

The divisional commander, General von Wenninger, decided, however, to attack Monchy that afternoon. About 3 P.M.—4 P.M. "summer time"—when the infantry was moving up, he heard from his artillery commander that the ammunition railhead at Vitry was under heavy fire, that the destination of the trains had been

altered to Corbehem, that the ammunition available was sufficient only to hold off one more big British attack, and that owing to the state of the roads the supplies could not be replenished during the night if they were expended now. This is the only reason given for the abandonment of the attack till we reach the history of the *18th Bavarian Regiment*, which admits that the British placed "an impenetrable barrage" east of Monchy.

The *26th Division* continued to hold its narrow front astride the Scarpe and the *18th Division* its wider one between Rœux Station and the railway north of Gavrelle.

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CHAPTER XI

THE BATTLES OF ARRAS 1917 : PLANS AND PREPARATIONS FOR THE CAPTURE OF THE VIMY RIDGE

(Maps 3, 7, 9, 10 ; Sketch A)

THE FIRST ARMY'S PLAN

THE primary task of the First Army, in order to cover the left of the Third, was the capture of the Vimy Ridge. It was a formidable undertaking.

Since the Germans had possessed themselves of this prominent feature of the Artois landscape in October 1914 they had applied their skill and energy to increasing its natural defensive strength. The eastern face of the ridge, steep and wooded, drops abruptly some two hundred feet to the plain, but to the west and south-west the ground falls away gently towards the upper reaches of the Scarpe. A few villages, an occasional copse, just serve to break the monotony of its surface. The original German line was established across this slope, some two miles from the crest, thereby providing ample depth for defence. Southward, the line ran downhill to the Scarpe valley east of Arras ; to the north, after traversing the narrow but dominating Lorette ridge beyond the Souchez stream, it descended to the plain near Loos.

This seven-mile, high-lying and commanding entrenchment, stretching from Ecurie to Notre Dame de Lorette, soon ranked as one of the main bastions in the German defences between the Oise and the coast. Its strategic importance caused it to play a major part in the French offensives of spring and autumn 1915. At their close the great bulwark remained in the hands of the invader ; but successive assaults, carried out with matchless courage and resolution and at a cost of 150,000 casualties, narrowed

the German grip upon it. In the southern buttress near Ecurie part of "The Labyrinth", that notorious, warren-like redoubt, was left unconquered. Further north, however, the French expelled the Germans from Carency, Neuville St. Vaast, and a number of exceedingly strong miniature fortresses. In the Souchez valley they took Ablain St. Nazaire and Souchez in some of the fiercest fighting of the War. The northern corner-stone, near the chapel of Notre Dame de Lorette, was captured, and the defenders were driven back to the Bois en Hache at the eastern extremity of the Lorette ridge. As a result of these battles the enemy's defensive system on the Vimy Ridge had thus become cramped, while east of Notre Dame de Lorette he maintained no more than a precarious foothold.

Such was the situation when the British succeeded to the legacy of this battlefield in the spring of 1916. Although the French had failed to clear the ridge, they had rendered its capture a less difficult task. They had also learnt a lesson. Summing up the causes of failure in the operations of May and June 1915, General Joffre found the principal to be the inadequacy of the artillery preparation. "It is essential to concentrate on the front to be assaulted sufficient artillery, heavy and field, to crush all resistance."¹ Similarly, General Foch, reporting on the offensive in September and October, considered that failure was due to "the lack of a sufficiently accurate or an adequate artillery preparation". "None but our heavy batteries", he added, "could demolish the formidable defences which confronted us."² Shortage of heavy artillery and ammunition was not, however, the only handicap under which the French laboured. Within the German defences were numerous caves, connected by tunnels, some of them believed to have been used in the Wars of Religion. From these caves the Germans had cut into their front-line system exits by which the garrison could emerge fresh to meet the assault at the conclusion of any bombardment.

¹ F.O.A. iii., pp. 72, 107, and Annexes 446, 1125.

² F.O.A. iii., Annexe 3056. This annexe shows what efforts were made to meet the demand for ammunition. For the six days' bombardment and the assault on 9th May 1915 32,500 rounds of heavy and 222,000 of field ammunition were used. For the assault on 16th June this total was more than doubled (77,500 and 442,000 respectively). For the preliminary bombardment and assault on 25th September the amount of heavy ammunition expended was more than four times that employed in the operation of 9th May (147,550 rounds of heavy and 565,000 rounds of field).

The commander of the British First Army, General Sir Charles Monro, found himself in agreement with the views of Generals Joffre and Foch. In his report of the 7th July 1916 on operations which might prove useful subsidiaries to the offensive then already launched on the Somme, he described an attack on the Vimy Ridge as "not possible" unless the enemy showed signs of weakening", because it would require a quantity of heavy artillery which he knew would not be available. In September, preparations were made for a local attack north of Neuville St. Vaast. This plan was, however, dropped, and no attempt was made that year to conquer the great German bastion. In the memorandum of the 17th November concerning his proposed plans for 1917 the Commander-in-Chief directed the First Army to "prepare an attack on the Vimy position to "secure observation over the Douai plain and assist the "advance of the Third Army on its right". Definite orders to this effect were issued by G.H.Q. on the 2nd January 1917.

On the 31st January, General Sir H. S. Horne, General Monro's successor in the command of the First Army, issued his plan of operations.¹ In his preamble he described the capture of the ridge, and particularly that of Thélus and Hill 135, as "vital to the success of the Third Army". This opinion was shared by General Allenby, who stated that without the secure possession of the Vimy Ridge he would not consider either his flank or his communications to be safe. The main crest was therefore to be the objective of the first (Southern) operation, on which every effort was to be concentrated. If this were successful, Hill 120 or "The Pimple", at the northern extremity of the ridge, and the Bois en Hache, at the eastern end of the Lorette ridge, were to be captured by a separate (Northern) operation. If the enemy lost these two positions on either side of the Souchez he would be deprived of the last footing in the bastion of which he had so long enjoyed the protection.

The Southern assault was to be launched on a frontage of four miles, from Ecurie to east of Givenchy, by the four Canadian divisions of the Canadian Corps (Lieut.-General the Hon. Sir J. H. G. Byng), assisted by the 13th Brigade, (British) 5th Division. It was to be simultaneous with the offensive of the Third Army astride the Scarpe.

The Northern operation was to be carried out by the right of the I. Corps (Lieut.-General A. E. A. Holland), assisted by the left Canadian division. The rest of the

¹ Appendix 11.

First Army front, held by the remainder of the I. Corps and the XI. Corps further north, had no part in the offensive, except that these corps were to join in an artillery demonstration beginning six days prior to the infantry attack and lasting until two days after its inception.¹

By the middle of March the Army commander was informed that the 8th April was the date to which he was to work. On the 26th March he issued his operation order for the battle.² This was only a confirmation of previous instructions. The Canadian Corps had already issued a "scheme of operations",³ and the dispositions of the First Army had been readjusted as a preparatory measure. In order to enable the Canadian Corps to concentrate on the Vimy plateau for the main (Southern) operation, the 24th Division of the I. Corps had in early March taken over the northern part of its front from Givenchy, across the Lorette ridge, to Loos, thus setting free the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions. The I. and XI. Corps now held the whole of the First Army front except the Vimy sector: the I. Corps from Givenchy to Auchy les la Bassée, the XI. northwards to Picantin.

On the arrival of the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions on the Vimy plateau, all four divisions of the Canadian Corps were placed in line in numerical order from right to left, each in its battle zone. The whole Canadian contingent, unsurpassed in potential quality, had made rapid progress in efficiency during the winter months, and by the spring of 1917 it had been welded into a fighting force as well qualified for its great task as any formation on the Western Front.

The long, gradual slopes of Hills 135 and 145, which formed the crest of the ridge, bounded the eastern horizon of the Canadians. As, however, their trenches lay south to north and the direction of their offensive was to be due east, while the ridge ran from south-east to north-west, the tasks of the four divisions were very different in scope. The right would have to cover 4,000 yards in order to reach

¹ The following allotments of shell were made for this purpose to the defensive sector of the I. Corps and to the XI. Corps:—

		Rounds	
		I. Corps	XI. Corps
18-pdr. . . . .	.	24,000	19,000
4.5-inch howitzer . . . . .	.	5,000	4,000
60-pdr. . . . .	.	2,500	2,500
6-inch howitzer . . . . .	.	800	800

² Appendix 27.

³ Appendix 12.

its objective, whereas an advance of 700 yards would carry the left to the summit of Hill 145. The four divisions were each to attack with two brigades in first line and one in reserve. The whole British 5th Division was placed at the disposal of Lieut.-General Byng. Its 13th Brigade, attached to the 2nd Canadian Division, was to take an important part in the final stage of the advance; the 15th and 95th Brigades were to be retained in Canadian Corps reserve.

The first onset was to carry forward the whole line across the three successive trenches which formed the German first system, a penetration of, on the average, 700 yards, for which the time-table allowed 35 minutes. This would place the 4th Division on the left in possession of Hill 145, and, with most of its task accomplished, open up to it the prospect of the great Douai plain at its feet.

After a pause of forty minutes for consolidation, the attack was to be resumed. The 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions were now to carry out a further advance of 400 yards; the 3rd was to press on slightly further in order to reach the edge of the ridge, bordered by the Bois de la Folie; and the 4th, moving down the eastern slope of Hill 145, was to seize the German reserve trenches (*Hangstellung*) which were cut along the steep slope. Both 3rd and 4th would now, at Zero plus 95 minutes according to the time-table, have reached their final objectives; but the 1st and 2nd would still have a considerable distance to go. As the sector of the 2nd now opened fanwise, the British 13th Brigade would come forward on its left to form the left wing of the advance up to the final objective. This stage was to be covered in two more bounds, the first of which, including Thélus, Hill 135, Thélus Wood, Count's Wood and the greater part of the Bois du Goulot, was to be concluded at Zero plus 5 hours, 20 minutes. The fourth objective was the German second-line position below the crest, running through Farbus Wood, the Bois de la Ville and the Bois du Goulot. The capture of the ridge would thus be completed, at Zero plus 7 hours, 48 minutes. The 1st Canadian Division would establish its right east of the Commandant's House on the Thélus—Bailleul road, and the left of the 13th Brigade, attached to the 2nd Canadian Division, would be thrown back in touch with the right of the 3rd in the Bois de Bonval.¹

¹ In the instructions and orders the first, second, third and fourth objectives were distinguished as the Black, Red, Blue and Brown Lines, respectively.

Though the defences were shallow by comparison with the system already being organized further south, they were as strong as they could be made on a cramped front. In addition to the trench lines, protected by deep belts of wire, the plateau was chequered with elaborate redoubts and concrete machine-gun emplacements. There were numerous dug-outs and tunnels as well as the old caves deep in the chalk. It was known, too, that along the upper edge of the woods on the eastern face of the ridge, within the final objective a number of German batteries were emplaced in concrete casemates. An essential part of the scheme was that the hostile strong points should be occupied by machine-gun detachments directly the infantry had captured them, as an immediate safeguard against counter-attack. The position was to be consolidated by a line of posts on the eastern slope, along the upper edge of the woods; a main line of resistance 600 yards in rear and about one hundred yards behind the crest; and strong points with machine guns some four hundred yards behind the main line and the same distance apart.

No particular secret was made of the plan, except as regards the day and the hour. The Canadians had therefore ample time to make themselves acquainted with all its details. Ever since January, the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions had been able to rehearse their parts. Several of their battalions were to find themselves on the morning of the assault in trenches which they had known for six months, facing German trenches and crater posts which they had observed, discussed, and even raided, and the replicas of which on the training-ground they had captured time and time again. The 1st and 2nd Divisions had also had a clear four weeks since their relief by the I. Corps, though the British 13th Brigade was not quite so fortunate. In the rest areas the defences were reproduced in detail from aeroplane photographs. A plasticine model of the Vimy Ridge, made by Mr. Oswald Birley, was studied at First Army headquarters by a large number of officers and non-commissioned officers. All ranks were thus enabled by means of frequent practice and lectures to learn thoroughly their rôle throughout the assault and were drilled to perform it with a thoroughness for which there was no precedent.

THE PREPARATIONS

To ensure the success of this plan the efficacy and adequacy of the artillery preparation was all-important. The broad principle that the artillery conquers and the infantry occupies was even more than usually applicable in the case of defences such as those of the Vimy Ridge. The First Army artillery, under the command of Major-General H. F. Mercer, had therefore been strongly reinforced. By the latter part of March the siege and heavy batteries at the disposal of the Canadian Corps (G.O.C. R.A., Br.-General E. W. B. Morrison; Br.-General Heavy Artillery, Br.-General R. H. Massie) numbered 58.¹ The heavy artillery of the I. Corps (G.O.C. R.A., Br.-General M. Peake; Br.-General Heavy Artillery, Br.-General A. Ellershaw) consisted of 28 batteries.² Four 12-inch howitzers, in addition to the four pieces of this calibre attached to the Canadian Corps, and a single 12-inch gun, were at the disposal of the Army.

The 245 heavy guns and howitzers of the Canadian Corps were disposed in the Scarpe valley, in the Fond de Vase, in a thick cluster near Berthonval Farm, and near Carency, all west of the Arras—Ablain St. Nazaire track. Those of the I. Corps, numbering 182, were on the northern slope of the Souchez valley, in and about the Bois de Bouvigny and de Noulette, and in the neighbourhood of Aix Noulette and Bully Grenay. They were in a position both to engage the German batteries opposite, which might otherwise take part in opposing the Canadian Corps, and to enfilade the German trenches facing the Canadian left. Their function was also to prepare and support the Northern attack. The eight bombardment groups of the Canadian Corps were allotted by pairs to the front of each division, and provided one heavy or medium howitzer to every forty or fifty yards of frontage; but, taking into account all heavy pieces for bombardment

¹ The Canadian Corps heavy artillery comprised the I. and II. Canadian, XIII., XVIII., XXVI., XXX., XLIV., LXX., and LXXVI. Heavy Artillery Groups. The pieces numbered 54 60-pdrs., 104 6-inch howitzers, 8 6-inch guns, 36 8-inch howitzers, 36 9·2-inch howitzers, 4 12-inch howitzers, and 3 15-inch howitzers.

² LXIII. and LXXIX. Heavy Artillery Groups (bombardment), XV., XXXI., and LXXXIV. Heavy Artillery Groups (counter-battery), comprising 60 60-pdrs., 40 6-inch howitzers, 8 6-inch howitzers, 4 8-inch howitzers, and 20 9·2-inch howitzers. A 4·5-inch howitzer battery was allotted to each of the three counter-battery groups.

and counter-battery combined, there was one to every 20 yards of the corps frontage. Preparatory to the opening of the Battles of the Somme the proportion had been one to 57 yards.

The field artillery was placed at the disposal of the four divisions, its action being co-ordinated by the artillery commander of the Canadian Corps. It consisted of 30 brigades, containing 480 18-pdrs. and 138 4.5-inch howitzers.¹ To these 618 pieces must be added 102 (66 18-pdrs. and 36 4.5-inch howitzers) of the I. Corps. This was a proportion of one to approximately every ten yards of frontage, compared with one to twenty, nine months earlier on the Somme.

The line of the field artillery was from 500 to 1,500 yards in front of the heavy batteries, and it was not practicable to advance it further on account of the German command of the bare slopes. On the other hand, the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions had to penetrate to a depth varying from 2,300 to 4,000 yards; that is, a maximum distance of 6,500 yards from the guns. In order to take over the creeping barrage for the final stage of the advance here, and to cover the final objective till the mass of the artillery could move forward, nine 18-pdr. and two 4.5-inch howitzer batteries were dug in by night from 500 to 1,500 yards behind the front line, about Neuville St. Vaast. Registration was carried out under cover of the fire of batteries in rear; otherwise, with the exception of a few guns used for "sniping" during the bombardment, these batteries remained silent and unseen by the enemy until they were required.

Ammunition was divided into two classes, bulk and daily, the bulk allotment for the Canadian and I. Corps being 42,609, and the daily allotment 2,465 tons. The arrival of the ammunition from the Base began in early January, and by the end of March it had been stored in the dumps. There was no such last-minute rush as occurred in the Third Army. Apart from the forward dumps, six First Army dumps were formed at Boyeffles, Verdrel Wood, Grand Servins, Estrée Cauchie, Cambigneul, and Le Pendu, each with a capacity for 5,000 tons.² Three G.H.Q.

¹ Divisional artillery of the 1st Cdn., 2nd Cdn., 3rd Cdn., 5th, 31st and 63rd (R.N.) Divisions; V. and XI. Brigades R.F.A. (acting as 4th Cdn. Division artillery); V. (Army) Brigade R.H.A.; XVIII., XXVI., XXXIII., LXXII., LXXVI., XCIII. and CCXLII. (Army) Brigades R.F.A.

² The rear area of the First Army is not shown on the maps. These places lay N.W. to N.N.W. of Arras and 8 to 10 miles distant from it.

dumps were also established in the First Army area, at Treizennes, Robecq and Diéval.

The concentration of troops necessitated the construction by the Royal Engineers of fresh accommodation, including 400 huts and numerous smaller shelters for infantry, dépôts for rations and stores, and quarters for casualty clearing stations. Timber was particularly in demand for the ammunition dumps, for "footings" to prevent the stacks of shell sinking in the wet ground, and for slab or plank alley-ways from the roads. One hundred portable bridges were also constructed to enable field artillery to cross the trenches. In order to save the long railway carriage from the dépôts near Calais and Abancourt, a saw-mill was installed by No. 2 Forestry Department in the Bois des Alleux. Upon the engineers also fell the work of developing the water-supply. Provision had to be made for a daily consumption of 600,000 gallons, the greater proportion of it pumped from springs. Twenty-two engines were installed and 45 miles of pipe-line were laid to distributing-points. Near Au Rietz and in the Souchez valley 50,000-gallon underground reservoirs, with a 25-foot protective covering, were excavated.

Another heavy task was the repair and maintenance of the 28 miles of roadway in the forward area of the Canadian Corps. Owing to the immense quantity of the traffic, the intense frost, sudden thaw, and heavy rainfall of the first three months of the year, this proved exceptionally difficult. The main roads, radiating from Arras, crossed the general line of attack, and only two second-class roads, Villers au Bois—Carency—Souchez and Mont St. Eloy—Neuville St. Vaast, were of much value. New roads had therefore to be constructed, including three miles of plank road in the forward area. Most of them were in full view of hostile observation posts, so that the delivery and laying down of the material had to be carried out by night. It is remarkable that this road work and the nightly traffic should have suffered so little interference from the Germans. For example, night after night at least 1,800 vehicles passed through the bottle-neck of Mont St. Eloy, to return before daylight, seldom if ever being shelled at that important road junction.

A system of some twenty miles of tramway in the Canadian Corps area was extended and partly reconstructed. Over three miles of new line were laid, with many additional sidings to battery positions, dumps and dressing-

stations. Again, almost all this system lay in view of the enemy and therefore could be operated only during the hours of darkness. It was successfully maintained and delivered a maximum nightly load of 830 tons of rations, ammunition and engineer stores.¹ The tramway was also found useful for the transportation of the wounded, over one thousand casualties being brought back by its means on the first day of the battle alone.

If Messines represented the greatest achievement of the War in offensive mining, the Battles of Arras marked the outstanding effort of protective tunnelling. The part played by the tunnellers on the Third Army front has already been described. On that of the First Army it was even more important owing to the commanding position of the enemy. When the British took over the front from the French, they found the Vimy sector largely undermined by the Germans. No less than seventy mines were fired in the first two months, mostly by the enemy. By the end of the summer of 1916, however, the British miners had gained the upper hand and the Germans had virtually abandoned the struggle. The British tunnelling companies were thus released for the more profitable task of excavating or extending twelve subways to the front line. The tunnels, dug 25 feet below ground, totalled 10,500 yards, or just six miles, in length, the longest being 1,883 yards. Like the Arras tunnels, most of them were lit by electricity and carried telephone cables, some also tramways and water-mains. Chambers cut into their sides provided accommodation for brigade and battalion headquarters, dressing-stations and stores. The subways proved of great value for trench reliefs, for the forming-up of battalions for the assault, and later for the evacuation of wounded. Several of them were continued by galleries or Russian saps, which had exits into mine craters in No Man's Land. New mines, to demolish certain strong points in the enemy's front line, were laid. Galleries were also prepared which could be opened after the assault to serve either as communication or cable trenches. This work was carried out by the 172nd, 176th, 182nd and 185th Tunnelling Companies, under Lieut.-Colonel G. C. Williams, Controller of Mines, First Army.

It was the intention to support the attack by a preliminary discharge of smoke and gas. Smoke shell was to

¹ Five petrol engines and 400 mules were used for haulage, and about 300 push trucks were also employed.

be fired by Stokes mortars so as to cover areas which will be described in the course of the narrative. For the discharge of gas drums 2,000 projectors, under control of four companies of the Special Brigade, R.E., were installed in the front line. Actually, the wind was too high to allow the gas to sink into the deep underground shelters of Thélus, Les Tilleuls and Givenchy, so that this part of the programme had to be abandoned.

All this work, carried out under the orders of the Chief Engineer of the Canadian Corps, Br.-General W. Bethune Lindsay, and under the supervision of the Chief Engineer of the First Army, Major-General G. M. Heath, was in addition to the more detailed preparations made by the field companies and pioneer battalions of the Canadian divisions.¹

The arrangements for communication were thorough. Cable, buried to a depth of seven feet, was installed along the whole corps front. Between January and mid-March, 21 miles of new route were laid, making 1,500 miles of circuit in all, and cable was stored in the subways to be run along the enemy's communication trenches after their capture. Airlines were run up to within 2,000 yards of the front line, using 1,100 miles of wire, including 66 miles of new route. Wireless, power-buzzers and amplifiers, and carrier pigeons were provided as for the Third Army.² The open surface of the plateau being ideal for visual signalling, five main receiving stations were established between Ecurie and Hill 131. Many of the forward artillery observers were able to use visual signalling direct to their batteries. By night also signalling by means of lamps was successfully carried out.

Eight tanks were attached to the 2nd Canadian Division to assist its advance on and beyond Thélus. No great reliance could, however, be based upon their help owing to

¹ In addition to the tunnelling companies, the following R.E. units were at the disposal of the Canadian Corps :—1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 20th, 215th Army Troops Companies, Canadian Permanent Base Engineer unit, 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Canadian Entrenching Battalions, No. 1 Pontoon Park, No. 3 Light Railway Operating Section, No. 38 Prisoners of War Company, 3rd Canadian Railway Construction Company, 20th Light Railway Company, and Labour companies of the Royal Fusiliers, King's, Queen's and Northamptonshire Regiments.

² Communication by power-buzzer proved partially successful. Sixteen messages were sent on the day of the assault, of which 8 were received complete and 6 incomplete.

Owing to the excellence of alternative means of communication only 12 pigeons were flown on that day.

the dreadful condition of the ground, and the plans of both infantry and artillery were therefore made independent of their action.

During the preparatory period the Royal Flying Corps carried out invaluable work both in photography and artillery observation. Despite the temporary superiority of both German pilots and machines, the hostile defences had been completely photographed some weeks before the opening of the bombardment, so that an up-to-date map could be produced. This map not only formed the basis of the artillery preparation but also enabled each stage of the infantry advance to be rehearsed in detail. The bulk of the photography was carried out by No. 16 Squadron (Major P. C. Maltby), First (Corps) Wing, which was allotted to the Canadian Corps for that purpose, for reconnaissance within 4,000 yards of the front line, and for counter-battery work with the artillery. It was assisted by No. 2 Squadron, attached to the I. Corps. The four squadrons of the Tenth (Army) Wing, working with the First Army, were also available: Nos. 8 (Naval) and 40 for offensive patrols and attacks on balloons; Nos. 25 and 43 for protection of artillery machines, long and medium distance reconnaissance and photography, and medium distance offensive patrols.¹ Useful information was also supplied by No. 1 Kite Balloon Squadron R.F.C. It is probable that without such assistance from the air the Vimy bastion would have remained impregnable to a frontal assault.

From their observatories on the dominating Hills 145 and 135 the Germans must have seen each morning fresh evidence of the British preparation, which could not be concealed. Yet, as in front of Arras, they made little effort to interrupt it. This absence of retaliation, this suffering in silence, so inexplicable as to lead to the belief that the enemy intended to evacuate the ridge,² enabled the programme to be carried through more smoothly than had

¹ "The War in the Air", Vol. III., p. 332.

² Of this there was, in fact, no question. Rather did the enemy work to secure his hold upon it. For this purpose an attack had been planned by the *16th Bavarian Division* with the object of forcing the British troops from the northern end of it. The operation was based on the use of a large quantity of gas shell, and as the direction of the wind remained persistently unfavourable, it was postponed. The reasons given by German authorities for the lack of retaliation are mentioned in Note at end of Chapter XIII., but it may be said here that the court of enquiry into the loss of the ridge severely criticized the failure to interrupt the British preparations.

been expected. It was, indeed, hindered by the vagaries of the spring more than by hostile interference. Bitterly cold winds carrying sleet and snow swept across the plateau, with intervening days of warm sun or drenching rain, so that the ground, frozen, thawed and flooded by turns, became a quagmire. The roads, crowded all night long with an incessant stream of heavy traffic, and the communication trenches, trodden by an endless succession of feet, became thick with mud and would have collapsed without constant repair.

The Canadian troops watched with astonishment the assembly of the great array of artillery, the accumulation of vast quantities of shell, and the unprecedented completeness of the preparations in all respects. The sight raised their spirits above the mire, though their feet might sink into it. It inspired them with that confidence which was the only other element now needed to ensure their success.¹

THE PRELIMINARY BOMBARDMENT

The action of the artillery was outlined by the artillery headquarters of the First Army on the 8th February.² The plan contained two noteworthy features : first, arrangements for a liaison much closer than usual between the heavy artillery headquarters and the infantry divisions, and, secondly, the unprecedented importance attributed to counter-battery work. The correlation of information from aircraft, balloons, sound rangers, flash spotters and ground observers,³ and its rapid transmission to those who could take immediate and effective action formed the basis of the scheme ; and it was emphasized that success would largely depend upon co-operation between artillery and machine guns on the one hand and the Army and Canadian Corps Intelligence on the other.

With the aid of aeroplane photographs, all points in the defensive system whose destruction appeared essential to the success of the attack were carefully tabulated. No more than on the Third Army front was any attempt made to demolish all the trenches. The bombardment was

¹ A table of statistics, compiled some months after the battle, probably for the information of the Government, is given in Appendix 52.

² Appendix 15.

³ Observation posts near Arras had a flank view behind the Vimy Ridge of an area in which many German batteries were situated.

directed especially against objectives such as trench-junctions, dug-outs, concrete machine-gun emplacements, strong points and entrances to tunnels; also against road-junctions, ammunition dumps and light railways to a depth of four to five thousand yards behind the German front. Similarly, the total destruction of wire entanglements was out of the question except in the case of the foremost lines of defence; elsewhere lanes were to be cut by the fire of medium howitzers using the non-delay action fuze. By night, every avenue of approach was to be kept under constant harassing fire, to ensure if possible that no reliefs or carrying-parties should reach the front without suffering loss.

The ruling principle laid down in the counter-battery scheme was that isolated batteries should be dealt with first of all, since those which were closely grouped could be more easily and economically neutralized with high explosive and gas shell. Special attention was given to the discovery and destruction of observation posts, and arrangements were made to blind with smoke shell at the time of assault those which appeared to have survived the bombardment. Close co-operation was maintained with the artillery of the XVII. Corps, Third Army, on the right, and that of the I. Corps on the left, for dealing with trench systems, woods, villages, and battery positions on the Canadian flanks.

In the Third Army, as we have seen, though there had been a considerable amount of artillery preparation prior to the 2nd April, that date was considered to mark the opening of the bombardment. In the First Army, however, it can only be said to mark its second and more intense phase. The first began on the 20th March, but during its duration of thirteen days only about half the batteries were allowed to come into action, in the hope of concealing as long as possible the great concentration of artillery. During the second period, named by the Germans with good reason "the week of suffering", special attention was given to the villages of Thélus, Les Tilleuls and Farbus. The artillery of the XVII. Corps assisted, and, in return, the Canadian Corps took part in the bombardment of Bailleul. Vimy, Petit Vimy, La Chaudière, Willerval and Givenchy were likewise bombarded, the last-named receiving in addition the attention of the I. Corps. The effect of the nightly harassing fire was proved by the rarity of overland tracks visible on photographs taken while

snow was lying. The Germans were compelled to use the communication trenches, and these were at frequent intervals raked with shrapnel.¹

In the demolition of the foremost trench system the artillery was aided by the heavy and medium trench mortars and the Stokes, though, owing to the condition of the trenches, difficulty was experienced in providing firm beds for the emplacements. The task of the heavy mortars was demolition, that of the medium and the Stokes principally wire-cutting, in which they were most successful.²

The 280 guns of the Canadian Machine-Gun Corps were used principally for harassing fire by night.³ They swept communication trenches, approaches across the open, dumps, gaps in the wire, and the hostile field-artillery batteries in the woods on the eastern slope of the ridge.

Low cloud and bad weather curtailed the co-operation of the Royal Flying Corps, but advantage was taken of every day and hour of good visibility. Photographs taken on the 24th March and the 3rd, 5th, 6th and 8th April disclosed the obliteration of the front-line system of defence, the destruction of long stretches of communication trenches, and the cuttings of lanes in dense entanglements both in front of and behind Thélus. The very existence of these particular belts of wire had been discovered only by means of a photograph taken after a snowy night. This photography, as well as attacks on the enemy's balloons, four to five miles behind his front, was carried out with great gallantry and at considerable cost in face of attacks by fast and efficient German aircraft. Air photography, allied with the other means of observation, also achieved remarkable results in the counter-battery programme. Subsequent investigation showed that 86 per cent. of the 212 active German battery positions on and behind the ridge had been correctly located.

The persistently wet weather impeded the flow of ammunition required to replenish the forward dumps

¹ Nevertheless, the Germans maintained their normal six-day reliefs, apparently without difficulty. The *263rd Reserve Regiment*, in front of Thélus, relieved its front-line battalion between 1 A.M. and 2 A.M. on the morning of the assault, "without casualties".

² It was intended to employ the Stokes in discharging lacrymatory bombs prior to the assault, but as the weather conditions were unsuitable they could not be used for this purpose. Half of these mortars were to be taken forward with the advance, for the purpose of throwing incendiary (thermit) bombs and laying smoke barrages.

³ The Canadian Corps was in possession of 358 machine guns, but 78 were held in reserve or were for other reasons not available for the front line.

during the bombardment,¹ but, allied with geological conditions, it also increased the effect of the shelling. Overlying the chalk formation of the ridge is a stratum of clay and decomposed chalk, mixed with fine sand. The effect of hurling nearly a million shells, about 50,000 tons of metal, on to the comparatively small area held by the Germans on the ridge was to turn the surface into a wilderness of clammy mud. The sides of trenches collapsed on the burst of a shell, and as the water could not drain quickly, they became quagmires of slime, in places knee-deep.² The forward defence system lost all continuity, and in places its trenches could no longer be distinguished. The garrisons of the deep dug-outs, situated about 120 yards apart in the first and second trenches, were isolated during daylight, while those in the more widely-spaced dug-outs of the third trench, which lay about 700 yards behind the first, were able to keep clear only small sections, known as "island positions", around them.³

By the eve of the assault it appeared that the "sufficiently accurate and adequate artillery preparation", which General Foch had declared in October 1915 to be necessary for the capture of the ridge, had been provided.

¹ On 1st April the Canadian Corps commander reported that there would be a general breakdown of ammunition lorries owing to the strain put upon them by the state of the roads. On 3rd April the First Army commander had to reduce the ammunition supply between railroad and the reserve dumps owing to a heavy snowstorm during the previous night.

² The expenditure of ammunition during the two phases of the bombardment was :

	Noon 20th March to Noon 2nd April		Noon 2nd April to Noon 9th April	
			Demolition	Counter-Battery
18-pdr.	155,000		492,000	..
4.5-inch howitzer	35,600		101,500	18,500
60-pdr.	22,400		23,700	87,000
6-inch gun	1,870		3,330	800
6-inch howitzer	39,600		102,000	7,000
8-inch howitzer	11,900			
9.2-inch howitzer	9,270		42,700	12,600
12-inch howitzer	49			
15-inch howitzer . . . . .	..		649	..
2-inch trench mortar	8,190		5,910	..
9.45-inch trench mortar	244		606	..

³ The supply of food to the German front-line garrison became extremely difficult. Ration parties often took six hours to make a journey which had formerly taken a quarter of an hour, and the food on arrival was cold and filthy. German accounts give this as one of the chief causes of the weakness of the defence and state that many of the front companies went without fresh food for two or three days at a time.

The British artillery had expended in the preliminary bombardment thirty times the amount of heavy-artillery ammunition employed by the French two years before, and more than double, proportionally to the extent of the front, the quantity of all natures employed prior to the Battle of the Somme on the 1st July 1916.¹ An eyewitness has remarked that, whereas the ground of the Somme battlefield appeared to suffer from smallpox, wide stretches of the Vimy Ridge seemed to be afflicted by confluent smallpox.

However efficient the artillery preparation, no amount of metal or explosive from above could destroy the main German dug-outs and tunnels twenty to fifty feet down in the chalk. Their strong garrison might still, if warned in time, emerge to cripple the assault, as they had that of the French in 1915. Another cause of uncertainty was the information contained in a captured German pamphlet, "Experience of the recent Fighting at Verdun", which showed how radical was the change now being made in the defensive organization of the enemy. It was the first evidence that for a rigid linear defence there was being substituted a mobile defence within a deep fortified zone, based on a network of keeps and machine-gun nests, and that immediate counter-attacks would be launched to recover any ground lost.

For the purpose of keeping abreast of any changes in the German dispositions, intelligence obtained from raids was a necessity. Parties which crossed No Man's Land every night during the period of the bombardment varied in strength from a few men to six hundred, the number sent out by the 10th Canadian Brigade on the night of the 31st March. The information obtained from the raiders, their prisoners, and captured documents confirmed the view that the majority of the deep dug-outs and tunnel entrances lay within the foremost zone of 700 yards which was to be covered by the first rush of the assault. The attacking infantry could not hope to reach and block the entrances before the garrisons turned out unless tactical surprise were obtained. A final bombardment prior to the assault was therefore dispensed with. Neither prisoners' statements, documents, nor photographs indicated any

¹ In the artillery preparation for the attack on the Vimy Ridge 333,100 rounds of heavy and 802,600 rounds of field ammunition were fired, a total of 1,135,700. On the 14-mile front of the Somme attack 1,503,000 rounds were expended.

similar network of strong points in the rearward part of the battle zone, or, indeed, any considerable change in the defensive organization.¹

Information obtained in the raids disclosed the fact that five German regiments faced the Canadian Corps, that four of them had been in the line at least five weeks, and that by the first week of April many of their companies had been reduced to a rifle strength of seventy or eighty.² It appeared that in each case one battalion formed the garrison of the first and second trenches, and that a second battalion was either in support in the third trench or in immediate reserve.³ Two-thirds of the front-line regiments, at most 5,000 men, might therefore be expected to meet the assault of the 15,000 Canadian troops. The remaining third, the five reserve battalions resting in villages five or six miles in rear, provided a reinforcement of 8,000 men to oppose 12,000 Canadian and British troops who were ready either to reinforce or to press through the first assault to the capture of the eastern face of the ridge. It was estimated that these German battalions might take two hours to reach the battle zone. There appeared to be no other reserves in the neighbourhood, but there were known to be at least two divisions in *Sixth Army* reserve near Douai, twelve to fifteen miles away. To entrain, travel to assembly areas on the Drocourt railway, and march to the battlefield would take them over four hours, even with the aid of Staff work of the highest quality.

The course of the battle would greatly depend upon whether the Germans discovered the day and hour of the assault and, acting on that knowledge, brought up overnight fresh divisions and heavy artillery from the reserves created by the recent retreat to the Hindenburg Line. The 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions, which had to make the longest advance, were the most likely to come in contact

¹ These raids brought retaliation from the German artillery, and the Canadian casualties were fairly high. They were, for the fortnight 22nd March to 5th April, 11 officers and 326 other ranks killed, 60 officers and 1,256 other ranks wounded or missing, the majority of these losses being incurred during or as a result of the raids.

² *3rd Bavarian Reserve, 261st Reserve, 262nd Reserve, 263rd Reserve, 11th Bavarian.* The last-named regiment, whose left faced the left battalion front of the Canadian Corps, had come into line on the 31st March. See Note at end of Chapter XIII.

³ The sector of the 3rd Canadian Division may be taken as a typical example. According to the information at its command, it was faced by the left of the *263rd Reserve Regiment* and the whole of the *262nd Reserve*, each of which had two battalions on the ridge and the third in rest billets at Bois Bernard and Neuville. This intelligence was substantially correct.

with such reinforcements. The original dumps at the guns of the ten field-artillery brigades supporting these divisions, including those of the advanced batteries about Neuville St. Vaast, were therefore increased from 700 to 1,300 rounds per 18-pdr. gun and from 600 to 800 rounds per 4.5-inch howitzer. An ample supply of ammunition to meet any possible counter-attack was thus provided.¹ The 60-pdrs. of the Canadian Corps were allotted an additional 10,000 rounds for the same purpose. It may justly be said that, taking into account all the facts ascertainable at the time, in no previous British offensive had so little been left to chance.

THE ASSEMBLY

On the evening of Easter Sunday, the 8th April, as soon as it was dark enough to conceal their movement, the Canadian infantry quitted their concentration areas in the woodlands about Marœuil, Mont St. Eloy, and Villers au Bois, to begin their three-mile approach march up to their assembly positions. After a fine, sunny day, the early part of the night was clear, with bright moonlight, but in the small hours of the 9th the sky clouded over and it became very dark. Nevertheless, so carefully prepared and timed was every movement that neither confusion nor delay occurred. Luminous stakes pointed the way through the battery positions and the maze of ammunition dumps. For many of the battalions the latter part of the march was carried out in the complete protection of the subways. Those which used communication trenches also passed up scatheless, but several which had to move across the open suffered some loss either from random harassing fire or from machine guns posted with the German sentry groups. Certain of these groups heard the arrival of troops in the assembly trenches, but any alarm given can only have been local.²

Patrols sent out at dusk had reported that the German wire was effectively destroyed. During the night parties

¹ One artillery officer who acted as forward observer has expressed doubt as to the extent of the assistance which could have been given by the artillery in such a case owing to the difficulty of establishing telephonic communication with the batteries.

² A company of the *262nd Reserve Regiment*, opposite the 3rd Canadian Division, reported at 2.30 A.M. (British time) that the assembly trenches were filling up. Most of the telephone cables were, however, cut, and messages by runner took so long to deliver that the information did not reach the German batteries until too late.

cut lanes in the British wire, and through these the leading companies of the assaulting battalions filed, to occupy new assembly trenches, mostly shallow ditches or the lips of old mine-craters, in No Man's Land. By 4 A.M. every battalion was in its place, and every man had received a warm meal and a tot of rum. On the front of the Canadian Corps alone, 52 battalions, 30,000 men, had assembled for battle in the dark on a front of nearly four miles, their leading companies within a hundred yards of the German outposts, without having given the alarm.

The next hour and a half was a period of suspense and physical discomfort. With the approach of dawn the temperature fell and squalls of snow and sleet drenched the men, as they stood shivering in the mud. Shortly before zero hour there was a strange stillness, as the Canadians awaited the moment of the assault.

On the stroke of 5.30 A.M. the whole array of batteries from beyond Arras to the Lorette ridge opened fire simultaneously, and two mines were exploded on the left of the battle-front under the German front line. A few seconds later a narrow belt of smoke, lit up by the flashes of bursting shrapnel, appeared across the German front. Above this long cloudy ribbon, rockets shot up into the dark sky to burst into coloured lights or showers of stars. After three minutes' rapid fire, three rounds a minute per gun, on the German first trench, the barrage began to creep forward in hundred-yard lifts every three minutes, the guns now firing two rounds a minute each.¹ Four hundred yards ahead a bullet-swept zone was created by 150 machine guns grouped in 8-gun batteries, which were to keep up continuous fire, half of each group covering the advance of the other half during the pauses at each objective.²

Simultaneously, all the German battery positions and ammunition dumps were bombarded with high explosive

¹ The creeping barrage was fired by two-thirds of the 18-pdr. batteries, about one gun to 25 yards of frontage. The remaining third (less the silent forward batteries) formed standing barrages on important sections of trench beyond the creeping barrage. The 4.5-inch howitzers fired on selected strong points, lifting when the "creeper" arrived within 150 yards of the targets. The heavy and medium howitzers also co-operated, the lifts in their case being made when the "creeper" had approached to within 300 yards.

The creeping barrage had been twice rehearsed: at 8 A.M. on 6th April at half strength, and at 1.30 P.M. on 7th April at full strength. These rehearsals tended to mislead the enemy.

² This barrage was organized by the Canadian Corps. One hundred and thirty machine guns with the assaulting brigades remained under divisional control.

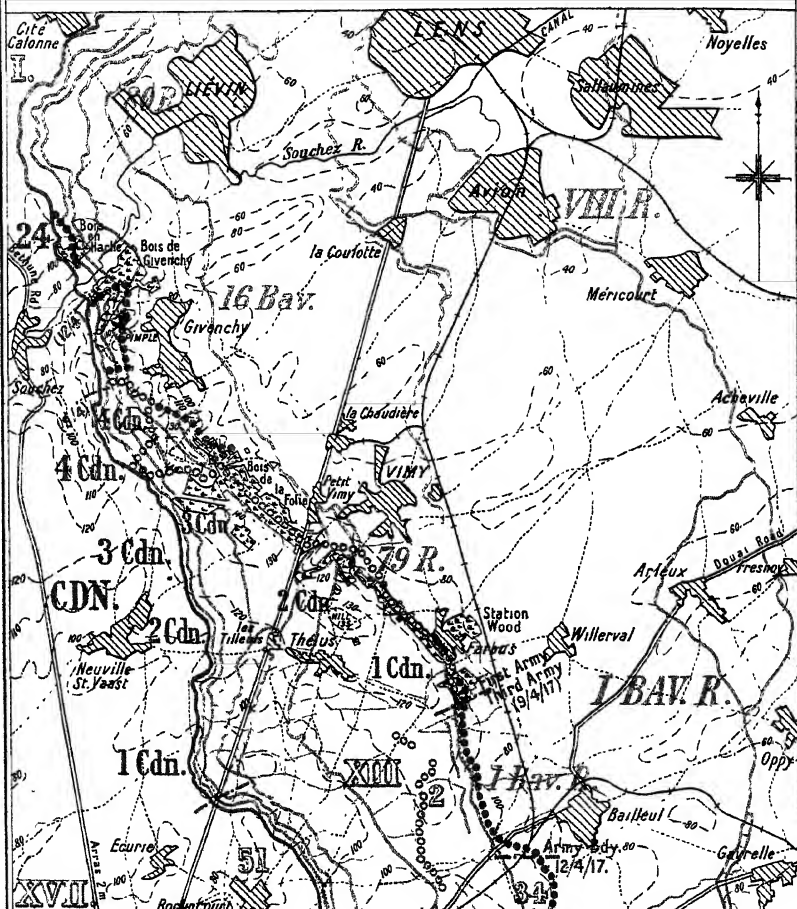
and gas shell, and in places, such as in front of Thélus and Hill 135, a smoke barrage was laid by Stokes mortars with the object of screening the advancing infantry. The counter-battery fire was extremely accurate and well-distributed. In any case, many of the horses of the German gun-teams and ammunition columns were affected by the gas, so that the batteries could neither change their positions nor get up ammunition. Most of the observation posts having been destroyed and the telephone cables cut, the batteries were also blind to events in the foremost defences. In consequence, there was only a very feeble response to the rocket signals from the front line.

Sketch 15.

VIMY

ATTACK OF CANADIAN CORPS

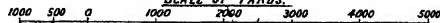
9th–12th April, 1917.



REFERENCE.

British Front Line, 9th April ——— British Line, 12th April ●●●●●
 British Line, 2 p.m. 9th April ○○○○○○ Germans Green

SCALE OF YARDS.



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CHAPTER XII

THE BATTLES OF ARRAS 1917 : THE BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE, 9TH APRIL

(Maps 7, 10 ; Sketches 15, 16)

THE ASSAULT

EVEN before the barrage had made its first lift the leading companies of the infantry were advancing. No Man's Land was crossed with few casualties. The hour had been fixed so that the assault should be launched at the first light of day, but dense cloud darkened the battlefield, and the ground was lit only by the glare of the barrage and of the German rocket signals. The Canadians were, however, thoroughly drilled in their several tasks, so that their approach was helped rather than hindered by the gloom. It was also assisted by the wind which, backing from north-west to west, blew the sleet into the faces of the enemy.

The 1st Canadian Division (Major-General A. W. Currie, headquarters, Labyrinth Tunnel, north of Ecurie) attacked on a front of 2,000 yards, its right on the road fork north-east of Ecurie in the Labyrinth salient and its left 300 yards south of the Neuville St. Vaast—Thélus road. The 5th, 7th, and 10th Battalions of the 2nd Brigade (Br.-General F. O. W. Loomis) on the right reached the first trench and rushed the sentries before the garrison could emerge from the deep dug-outs. Leaving parties to guard the stairways until the moppers-up arrived to deal with the occupants, the leading wave pressed on behind the barrage.¹

¹ While formations varied slightly, that of the 16th (Canadian Scottish) Battalion, 3rd Brigade, may be taken as typical of the whole Canadian Corps. Two companies moved in front line and two in support. Each front company was in two waves, each wave consisting of two platoons and moving in two lines 15 yards apart. One platoon from the support company followed in two lines 25 yards behind the first wave to mop up

The 15th, 14th, and 16th Battalions of the 3rd Brigade (Br.-General T. S. Tuxford) suffered rather more loss, little clusters of men being shot down before three machine guns were silenced, though none of them was given time to fire more than a few rounds.

The six battalions pressed forward to the second trench, and though casualties became more frequent, the dug-outs were again captured after opposition had been beaten down with the aid of rifle grenades and Lewis guns fired from the hip. In the third trench a strong point opposite the 14th (Montreal) Battalion caused heavy loss before two machine guns were silenced by grenades, another by rifle fire, and a fourth by bayoneting the team. The 16th Battalion also met with strong resistance in this trench.¹ After crossing the Arras—Lens road, indistinguishable owing to mud and debris, the two right-hand battalions were delayed and suffered considerable loss before they overcame resistance in the sunken track which branched off the highway towards Roclincourt. But by 6.5 A.M. half an hour after the start, the 1st Canadian Division was in possession of the *Zwölfer-Graben*, its first objective, having captured or killed practically the whole garrison. As has been indicated, a few German machine gunners fought with splendid courage, but the majority of the defenders appeared to be dazed and glad enough to find themselves prisoners and on the way to safety.

After a pause of forty minutes, during which the captured position was consolidated under cover of a standing barrage, the rear companies resumed the advance. It was now light enough for them to see the saucer-shaped depression south of Thélus. Seven hundred yards ahead, on the further side of this depression, ran the intermediate line, their next objective, and beyond it the ground rose steadily to the crest of the ridge. The saucer now to be crossed consisted of arable land reduced to a waste of mud, its only feature being a ruined farmstead near some skeleton trees known as Nine Elms. The German trench

the first trench. The second wave followed 25 yards behind the moppers-up. Another platoon from the support company followed, to mop up the second and third trenches. One hundred yards behind the second line of moppers-up the remainder of the support company followed in artillery formation.

¹ Private W. J. Milne, 16th Battalion, who had captured a machine gun, after bombing the crew, in the first trench, here captured a second gun and thus prevented serious loss. Killed shortly afterwards, Private Milne was awarded the posthumous honour of the V.C.

had an excellent field of fire, but the rain and sleet now turning to snow, together with the smoke barrage blowing across from Thélus, screened the attack until it had closed upon the objective. The defenders, whose spirit seems to have been weakened by the machine-gun barrage maintained during the forty minutes' pause, were quickly overcome. Those who were not captured retired down the communication trenches as fast as the mud would permit. At 6.50 A.M. observers reported "what appears to be a battalion "retiring over the skyline north of Commandant's House". In fact, this part of the ridge was now virtually abandoned.

Shortly after 7 A.M. the division had taken its second objective, the intermediate line, with the exception of 500 yards on the right where it turned south-eastward. To capture this the 1st (Western Ontario) Battalion of the 1st Brigade, passed through the 5th Battalion at 7.40, its right supported by the 1/4th Gordon Highlanders of the 51st Division. Once again, success was complete, 125 prisoners being captured in the trench.

The experience of the 2nd Canadian Division (Major-General H. E. Burstall, headquarters, Au Rietz Cave, south-west of Neuville St. Vaast) was somewhat similar to that of the 1st. Its front extended to the Neuville—Petit Vimy road, a distance of 1,400 yards. The leading brigades were disposed each with two battalions in front, one in support, and one broken up into carrying-parties.

The 18th (Western Ontario) Battalion, on the right of the 4th Brigade (Br.-General R. Rennie), suffered considerable loss from the fire of two machine guns, the crew of one of which was bayoneted by Sergeant E. W. Sifton single-handed.¹ North of the Thélus road the 19th (Central Ontario) Battalion of the 4th Brigade and the 24th (Victoria Rifles) and 26th (New Brunswick) of the 5th Brigade (Br.-General A. H. Macdonell) overran the enemy in the dug-outs. On approaching the second trench, however, spasmodic bursts of machine-gun fire became more frequent, and only a series of acts of individual courage and initiative prevented a serious check. By 6.5 A.M. the four battalions, after a steady uphill advance, had reached the line of the third trench, the division's first objective.

When the barrage moved on again, the support

¹ Sergeant Sifton, who was afterwards killed, was awarded the V.C. posthumously.

battalions of each brigade led the advance. On the seven-hundred-yard frontage of the 4th Brigade the 21st (Eastern Ontario) Battalion pushed on rapidly, bombing two machine guns in Les Tilleuls, and reached its objective beyond the village. In the ruins a field gun and a number of prisoners were captured, but not until half an hour later was the discovery made that there were large numbers of the enemy in an underground cave, the *Felsenkeller*. Here two battalion headquarters, six officers and over one hundred men, surrendered to the Canadians. The 25th (Nova Scotia Rifles) Battalion of the 5th Brigade, carrying all before it, reached its objective, the *Turko-Graben*, and with the aid of the moppers-up of the 22nd Battalion captured in all 390 prisoners and four machine guns. Both brigades had reached their objectives up to time, and now Thélus village and the rounded summit of Hill 135 loomed through the snow and smoke immediately ahead of their leading troops.

The 1st and 2nd Divisions were as yet only half way to the crest; but, by means of an advance of equal depth and in the same space of time, the 3rd and 4th Divisions were to drive the Germans completely off the ridge. Though the left had thus a shorter distance to cover than the right, it was considered to have the more difficult sector of the foremost defences to overcome, owing to the maze of deep mine-craters in its path, in each of which a German sentry group was posted. The 3rd Canadian Division (Major-General L. J. Lipsett, headquarters, Fort George, 1,500 yards west of Neuville St. Vaast) advanced between the Neuville—Petit Vimy road and the western corner of the orchards outlying the Bois de la Folie. In this sector two of the longest of the subways, Goodman (1,883 yards) and Grange (1,343 yards) had been tunnelled up to the front trench. The attack was carried out on the right by the 8th Brigade (Br.-General J. H. Elmsley) with the 1st, 2nd, and 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles, and on the left by the 7th Brigade (Br.-General A. C. Macdonell), with the Royal Canadian Regiment, Princess Patricia's Canadian L.I., and the 42nd Battalion (5th Royal Highlanders of Canada).

The leading companies gave the German machine gunners no chance to come into action; indeed, the 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles captured over one hundred and fifty of the enemy, many of whom were half-dressed, in the Schwaben Tunnel, which had an exit in the second

trench.¹ Despite the clinging mud, the advance, covered by a smoke screen and carried out with grim determination, reached the third trench in the allotted time. This trench had, however, been so far obliterated that many men pushed on without recognizing it into the halted barrage. After the pause for reorganization and consolidation, the rear companies passed through towards the second and final objective, the Bois de la Folie.

Snow and sleet combined to blot out landmarks, so that a number of men of the 5th Brigade, on the left of the 2nd Canadian Division, lost direction and swung across the front of the 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles, causing considerable confusion. Fortunately, so little resistance was encountered that as the advance progressed the situation could be rectified. Partly owing to the delay thus occasioned, two guns of the Canadian Machine-Gun Company reached the right of the objective, the Arras—Lens road, before the infantry. They took up a position near a ruined house by the roadside, and opened fire on a large party of Germans assembling one hundred yards down the slope. The gunners claimed to have inflicted over one hundred casualties, while a like number of the enemy were captured shortly afterwards in the dug-outs.² Special attention had been paid to La Folie Farm, suspected of being a nest of machine guns, and it had been reduced to a pile of stones and rubble. It was now overrun without opposition by the 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles.

Opposite the 7th Brigade, the enemy's resistance did not stiffen until its troops entered the Bois de la Folie. Here considerable loss was suffered before some dug-outs and broken sections of trench could be cleared. Soon

¹ These tunnels appear to have been used by the Germans only as dug-outs near their exits or for cover between the front trench-lines. The prisoners were taken at the exit of the Schwaben Tunnel before 6 A.M., yet no news reached the battalion headquarters (*I./263rd Reserve*) in the other end of the tunnel "until 7 A.M., when a wounded man who happened "to pass by the headquarters entrance gave the news that the English "had entered the battalion's position and were already in possession of "the third trench" (*Res. Inf. Regt.* 263).

² These guns also commanded the entrance to the Schwaben Tunnel. A German account runs: "No sooner had it been decided to abandon "the battalion headquarters at the tunnel entrance than the first English "appeared 200 yards away and brought a machine gun into action at the "Ruhleben House. Pursued by the fire of this troublesome gun, the "battalion commander, his staff, and twenty men went back along the "communication trench, knee-deep in mud, towards the second-line position; but most of the staff and all the men were killed or wounded "before reaching it" (*"Osterschlacht"*, 1, p. 40).

afterwards a counter-attack, moving up the *Stauwasser-Weg*, attempted to bomb the Royal Canadian Regiment out of these trenches in the wood, while another was launched against the point of junction with the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles; but both were repulsed.¹ A patrol of the 42nd Battalion, following a track down the steep wooded slope of the ridge, found no signs of the enemy, though actually within a few hundred yards to the north the Germans were in strength sufficient to cause many anxious hours to the neighbouring division.

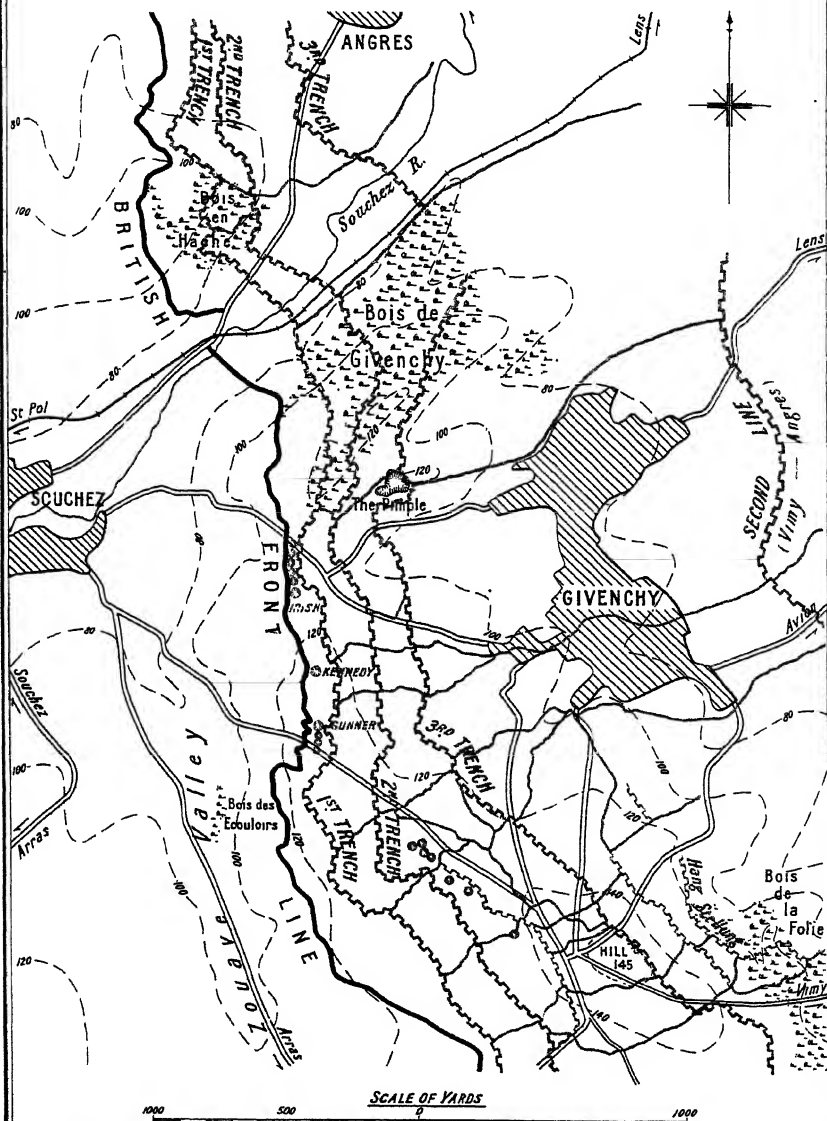
By 7.30 A.M. the western edge of the wood was in the hands of the 3rd Canadian Division. Although the wood had been heavily shelled, the battered trees formed a screen which hid the vista of the plain two hundred feet below, and fallen branches concealed a number of German snipers. The 8th Brigade was now to dig a line of trench one hundred yards west of the track running parallel and close to the edge of the wood. On the front of the 7th Brigade broken sections of trench within the wood were to be connected up and consolidated for defence. Supporting points with machine guns were to be established a few hundred yards behind this new line. Detachments of the divisional engineers had come forward to assist in the work, and the necessary tools and wire had been carried forward behind the attack by companies of the 49th (Alberta) Battalion and 5th Canadian Mounted Rifles. The consolidation was to be covered by Lewis-gun posts and patrols who were to descend the wooded eastern slope of the ridge. But as soon as these parties entered the belt of trees they were fired on by snipers, and casualties, slight so far, began to mount up rapidly. A few men of the right battalion of the 4th Canadian Division had advanced with the 42nd Battalion, creating a false impression, owing to which and to the sleet and smoke it was for some time not realized that no touch had been made with this division and that its troops had not yet advanced down the eastern slope of Hill 145.

Hill 145, the highest point on the Vimy Ridge, was to be assaulted by the 4th Canadian Division (Major-General D. Watson, headquarters, Château de la Haie, south-east of Gouy Servins). Owing to its commanding position, an

¹ These counter-attacks were delivered by a mixed force of the 262nd Reserve Regiment and various other groups hurriedly assembled. The Germans claim to have "driven back the enemy in close fighting and "stopped his advance", and to have killed 200 Canadians. There is no Canadian record of any such losses in this encounter.

Sketch 16.

BOIS EN HACHE — THE PIMPLE — HILL 145.



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exceptionally stubborn defence of the hill was to be anticipated. Looking westward, the German observers might watch every movement in the Souchez valley and over the Vimy plateau as far as Carency and Berthonval Wood. Looking eastwards, it would provide the British with an area of observation still more extensive over the German rearward defences in the plain of Douai, and also power to overlook and enfilade the forward defences on the ridge for some thousands of yards, if they were still held. The prize was therefore as great as the task of attaining it was formidable.

The distance to the rounded summit of the hill was barely seven hundred yards, and on the left to the crest of its northern slope was less than half that distance. But, just because there could be no question of defence in depth here, the defences were particularly strongly organized. The summit itself was trenched about like a fortress. A double tier surrounded it, the trenches on the northern and southern sides being constructed for the purposes both of fire and communication. The field of fire was almost ideal, shell-holes providing the only shelter for the attack. The trenches had been battered, but near the front line there were deep mine workings which secured the garrison from artillery fire. On the reverse slope there was also an extensive system of deep dug-outs (the *Hangstellung*) which protected the reserve companies. Surprise, to enable the dug-outs of the first and second trenches to be overrun, was even more important here than elsewhere. It was hoped that machine-gun and artillery barrages would materially assist in stopping any counter-attack from the *Hangstellung* or from Givenchy until a line of resistance had been established across the summit.

Preparations had been complicated by the situation of Zouave Valley, a deep southern offshoot of the Souchez valley which lay immediately behind the assembly trenches on the entire frontage of the division. On the slightest provocation the German artillery was wont to lay a barrage along this trough. In order to escape the consequences of such action during the hours preceding the assault, six subways, varying from 300 to 1,537 yards in length, had been tunnelled into the eastern slope of Zouave Valley. In addition, four communication trenches, eight to ten feet in depth, had been constructed. Another difficulty was the unusual width of No Man's Land. The mining situation in this sector was still not clear, and although a defensive

"lateral", or gallery parallel to the front, had been tunnelled to prevent the British line being blown off this narrow part of the ridge, it had been sited from 250 to 350 yards from the hostile front. For this reason assembly trenches had been dug to within one hundred and fifty yards of the German line, but even this distance was long considering the state of the ground and the importance of surprise.¹

The 11th Brigade (Br.-General V. W. Odlum) was disposed with the 102nd (Central Ontario) Battalion on the right and the 87th (Canadian Grenadier Guards) on the left, each on a frontage of 500 yards. The first objective was the trench along the road on the near side of the crest, which was to be consolidated as the Canadian main line of resistance. The support battalions, passing through on this line, were to carry the advance 250 yards across the summit to a trench on the reverse slope, which was to be held for the purpose of observation, with Lewis-gun posts in the *Hangstellung* immediately beyond.

The right battalion captured the front dug-outs by surprise, carried on up the bleak hillside, and reached the summit. The 54th (Central Ontario) Battalion, in support, then passed through behind the barrage. Unfortunately, however, this fine achievement was not repeated on the front of the Canadian Grenadier Guards, whose progress was blocked at the very outset by a German strong point, commanding at 400 yards' range the exit of Tottenham Tunnel. Although destroyed early in the bombardment, air photographs taken on the 7th had disclosed that this fortification and its covering wire had been repaired. The heavy artillery commander had desired to destroy it again, but at the request of the infantry, who proposed to make use of it when captured, it was allowed to remain. For this error a heavy price was now to be paid. Before the leading lines reached the German trench half of them had been put out of action by machine-gun fire, and the wire prevented all attempts to rush the strong point. The right

¹ Before the battle it was known from prisoners' statements that the Germans were aware of the work on these trenches. The Canadians were amazed that they made no attempt to interrupt it by frequent bursts of machine-gun fire. It is probable that the German attack projected at this point (see p. 311) caused the defence to disregard to some extent the Canadian preparations and tunnelling operations. The attack was to have captured the front trenches of the centre and left of the 4th Canadian Division, thus obtaining complete command over Zouave Valley. It was expected that this would compel the Canadians to withdraw to the far side of the valley and to abandon their mines and subways.

of the 75th (Central Ontario) Battalion in support was unable to leave the assembly trenches. The left of the 87th, supported by that of the 75th, had gone forward, but machine-gun fire from the uncaptured sector caused them heavy loss. The check gave the German garrison of the second trench time to come up into position, and its fire further broke up the waves of the attack still pressing forward on either flank. Despite its losses, the 54th Battalion carried on gallantly across the summit to its objective ; but the left of the 87th was so severely punished that it fell back and became entangled in the advance of the 12th Brigade.

At 7 A.M., therefore, when the barrage had moved beyond the German third trench, the left of the 11th Brigade had not reached the summit, and the left flank of the 54th Battalion was exposed. Persistent sniping, followed by a counter-attack, drove back these advanced troops, not without heavy loss, to the trench on the west side of the crest, where the 102nd Battalion was now firmly established.

The 12th Brigade (Br.-General J. H. MacBrien) formed the left wing of the offensive. So close was the crest in this sector that an advance of a couple of hundred yards would suffice for its capture and to obtain observation over Givenchy and the plain beyond. The brigade was disposed with three battalions in front line, the fourth being in support to the right flank, which had the longest advance. This last-named battalion had as final objective the German third trench on the reverse slope, though outposts were to be pushed further down the hillside. The centre and left battalions were destined to form a link between the right of the brigade in the southern houses of Givenchy and the right of the I. Corps, which was to stand on the defensive. For this purpose they were to occupy and consolidate the German communication trench which led up to Gunner Crater in the old front line. To screen their advance from enfilade fire from the outlying spur, Hill 120, known as the Pimple, at the extreme northern end of the ridge, a smoke barrage was laid beyond the left flank of the assault. This completely blotted out the spur and thus contributed considerably to the initial success.

The 38th (Ottawa) Battalion on the right took the first trench with few casualties, but its losses increased rapidly when, after a pause of seventeen minutes, it continued its advance. The ground was badly cut up, and some

of the water-filled shell-holes were so deep that several wounded men who fell into them were drowned. Moreover, the dug-outs in the second trench, deep in the chalk, had ramifications which enabled the garrison to come up in unexpected places. Partly owing to the gallant action of Captain T. W. MacDowell, who with two orderlies captured two German officers, 75 men, and two machine guns, this trench, the battalion's objective, was secured. Captain MacDowell was awarded the Victoria Cross.

The 78th (Winnipeg Grenadiers) Battalion, which was to pass through the 38th, was affected by the check to the 11th Brigade, and throughout its advance was subjected to enfilade fire from its right. This fire, and the heavy ground, prevented the battalion from keeping up with the barrage. Greatly to its credit, it reached the second trench, but its support companies arrived in front of the third as only a weak and scattered force, which was quickly counter-attacked and overpowered by the enemy. Elated by this success, the Germans, some two hundred in all, advanced against the two companies holding the trench behind; but they were quickly driven by Lewis-gun and rifle fire to take refuge in shell-holes.

The centre battalion, the 72nd (Seaforth Highlanders of Canada), captured the first trench easily, but, like its neighbour, lost the barrage and suffered many casualties before the second trench was bombed from a flank. A footing in the third trench was also obtained. Now, however, the smoke cloud began to clear from the Pimple, and machine-gun fire from it became so intense that no further progress could be made.¹ The 73rd (Royal Highlanders of Canada), the left flank battalion of the Canadian Corps, had as objective the German first trench only. Simultaneously with the opening of the bombardment, two mines were fired, which killed a great part of the German garrison in this sector. The remainder fled when the Canadians approached, and within seven minutes the trench had been seized. Touch was then established across No Man's Land with the right of the I. Corps at Gunner and Kennedy Craters. Despite the fact that the 12th Brigade had not reached all its objectives, it was in possession of the northern slope of the hill.

¹ On the subsequent capture of the Pimple two concrete machine-gun emplacements, which flanked the whole northern slope of Hill 145, were found.

THE OCCUPATION OF THÉLUS AND HILL 135

Soon after 7 A.M. the entire German front defence system had been captured from the Labyrinth salient to Gunner Crater, with the exception of the strip, about one hundred and fifty yards in width, where the 11th Brigade was held up at Hill 145. On the right the Canadian Corps was in touch with the 51st Division of the XVII. Corps; on the left connection with the I. Corps had been maintained.

The Canadians had reaped the full benefit of careful preparation followed by determined execution, combined with surprise at the moment of assault. The preliminary bombardment had demolished the main features of the German trench system and exhausted the garrison. The infantry assault, as German accounts admit, following a quiet night and a hurricane bombardment of only a few minutes' duration, gave the defenders no time to clamber out of the deep underground shelters. Only at Hill 145, where a section of wire had escaped destruction and the garrison had been given an opportunity to occupy the position, had the experiences of the French in 1915 been repeated.

The advance is compared in the German official account to the irresistible flow of the incoming tide, surrounding and submerging any obstacles in its path. This is indeed a tribute to the manner in which the methods advocated in the scheme of the Canadian Corps were carried out: that "if any unit is held up, those on the flanks will on no account check their advance but press forward themselves so as to envelop the strong point". Where the opposition did not succumb to these methods, supremely gallant attacks on isolated pockets of resistance by individuals and small groups, some of which have been mentioned though many more of almost equal merit have passed unrecorded, enabled the rapid progress of the assault to be maintained and prevented the re-establishment of any cohesion in the defence.

The 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions were already in possession of the northern half of the ridge except for the summit of Hill 145, but the 1st and 2nd had accomplished only half, though probably the more difficult half, of their task. There still existed a possibility that, unseen, a system of strong points and machine-gun nests had been

constructed in the rearward part of the battle zone, according to the latest German principle. On the other hand, it appeared that the Germans were definitely "on the run", and, from the number and condition of the prisoners, demoralized. The vast majority of the 62 officers and 3,342 other ranks captured during the day by the Canadian Corps were taken in this opening stage, a fact which confirmed previous information that the front defence system had not yet been converted into a lightly held outpost zone. The German mistakes and consequent defeat at Verdun, four months previously, had been repeated. In these circumstances, one at least of the divisional commanders wished to push his support battalions straight through to the final objective, which, if his surmise and information were correct, might have been reached in less than an hour, by 8 A.M., instead of the allotted hour of 1 P.M. Such a step was precluded by the inflexibility of the British method of carrying out an offensive according to a strictly pre-arranged time-table.

In this sense the hour of 7.15 A.M. represented the critical stage of the battle. Immediate pursuit offered the chance of securing the southern part of the ridge, with all its tactical advantages, before considerable German reinforcements could reach it. Weather conditions had hitherto prevented air reconnaissance from discovering whether the two German divisions in *Sixth Army* reserve near Douai, or other divisions known to be available, were on the move to the front. Yet, whereas the two first-mentioned divisions might reach the battlefield in four hours, the rate of the British advance allowed them six hours in which to establish a hold upon the southern part of the ridge. And though the Canadian preparations were so complete that this hold might have been only temporary, the German defence of the Chemin des Dames a week later must give rise to speculation as to the future course of the battle had the German counter-attack divisions been in readiness behind the ridge.

The time-table had indubitable advantages for the attack on a limited objective such as the Vimy Ridge, because it represented an insurance against local counter-attacks and would enable suspected strong points on Hill 135 and in Thélus to be dealt with systematically. Yet the Commander-in-Chief's intentions were not thus limited. The Third Army was to break through east of Arras and advance in the direction of Cambrai, while, to cover its left,

the First Army, after capturing the Vimy Ridge, was to advance in the direction of Douai. General Horne, in his outline of probable action, had stated that in the event of a rapid withdrawal of the enemy the 1st Cavalry Division would push forward to secure the railway at Hénin Liétard and the crossings of the Haute Deule and Sensée Canals.¹ Only by immediate exploitation of the situation on the ridge at 7.15 A.M. could such action on the part of the cavalry have been brought within the realms of possibility; yet in this respect neither the First Army artillery plan nor the Canadian Corps scheme made any allowance for the Commander-in-Chief's instructions.

Dark, heavy clouds swept low along the ridge while the new line was being consolidated. In rear some sharp combats were still taking place with parties of the enemy emerging from dug-outs which had been passed over. Meanwhile, at 7.30 A.M. the reserve brigades of the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions had advanced in artillery formation from their assembly trenches. As they plodded across the waste the heavy mud slackened their pace, and the men were sweating despite the cold when they reached their forming-up area east of the Arras—Lens road. They had suffered a certain amount of loss from spasmodic shelling.²

The third objective, the Roelincourt—Vimy track, included Hill 135 and Thélus, a long, straggling village on the southern slope, as well as the strongly wired Thélus Trench, the intermediate line, which cut across the western end of the village and crossed the western slope of the hill immediately in front of the summit. The intermediate line south of Thélus had already been taken by the 1st Canadian Division, but the 2nd had stopped five hundred yards short of it. Its fresh reserve brigades, the Canadian 6th and the British 13th, were now to carry out the assault on the village and the hill in one movement. On the stroke of 9.35 A.M., when the forward creep of the barrage was resumed, the five leading battalions of the two brigades advanced close behind it, crossed the five hundred yards of open ground, and rushed the intermediate line between Thélus and the Bois de Bonval. The wire had been well cut

¹ See Appendix 29.

² It was not until about 8.30 A.M. that the German barrage in this sector, never heavy, ceased entirely, as no further rocket signals were sent up by the infantry. "Nothing was yet known of the situation of the 'infantry on the ridge, since all telephone cables leading forward, including 'one buried 6 ft. deep, had been broken, and patrols sent forward could 'bring no enlightenment'" (Res. F.A. Regt. No. 63).

and the trench itself almost obliterated by the bombardment.¹

It was now 9.55 A.M. When the rocket signal, three Very lights, went up to proclaim the capture of this part of the intermediate line, the barrage, swelled by the advanced batteries which had hitherto been silent, increased its rate of fire on the whole frontage of the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions. Three minutes later it began to creep forward, lifting 100 yards every five minutes, and the general advance was resumed.

The 1st Brigade (Br.-General W. A. Griesbach) had deployed immediately east of the Arras road on the whole front of the 1st Canadian Division, now narrowed to a thousand yards. The advance was carried out by the 3rd (Toronto) and 4th (Central Ontario) Battalions, the 2nd (East Ontario) moving in artillery formation five hundred yards in rear and the 1st (Western Ontario) being prepared to form a defensive right flank in the event of any failure on the part of the 51st Division. The leading battalions passed through the troops which had captured the intermediate line, being played over the trench by the pipers of the Canadian Scottish and 48th Highlanders of Canada, and began the uphill struggle through the mire.

The advance was flanked and commanded by the ruins of Thélus, but not a single shot was fired from that direction. Nor was the frontal resistance of any account. As the troops topped the ridge, cloud and smoke of battle were symbolically dispersed by the wind and they saw below them in bright spring sunlight and beneath a blue sky villages with red-roofed houses set amid the verdure of country unspoiled by war. There was no sign of German reinforcements; indeed, the few parties to be seen were straggling eastwards. By 11.15 A.M. the brigade had reached the Roclincourt—Vimy track.²

¹ The artillery of the British 5th Division and the XXVIII. (Army) Brigade R.F.A., which had remained silent in the advanced positions in the sector of the 2nd Canadian Division, now took over the right of the divisional zone, approximately the front of the 6th Canadian Brigade. The four brigades which had covered the first assault of the 4th and 5th Canadian Brigades switched their fire to the northern half of the divisional zone, approximately that of the British 13th Brigade, which had not so far to go.

² In "Osterschlacht", 1, p. 81, there is a description of this scene. "The cessation of the snowstorm lifted the veil which had till now hidden the landscape, and we saw a remarkable sight. The air was suddenly clean and clear, filled with spring sunshine. The high ground about Thélus was covered with English storm troops standing about in large groups. The officers could easily be distinguished waving their short

The 2nd Canadian Division was faced by Thélus and Hill 135. The 6th Canadian Brigade (Br.-General H. D. B. Ketchen) on the right was already in the western part of the village, and the British 13th Brigade (Br.-General L. O. W. Jones) was within a couple of hundred yards of the summit of the hill. Both brigades went forward with fine determination, undeterred by the failure of the tanks which were to have assisted in this phase, none of which succeeded in crossing No Man's Land.¹

The 31st (Alberta) and 28th (North West) Battalions advanced on Thélus, to the right and left respectively of the main street. Bombers moved along the trenches on either side while a Lewis-gun section, sent forward up the main street, covered the infantry. Thirty-five Germans surrendered to the 28th Battalion on the north side; otherwise the mass of rubble which now represented the village was deserted. Simultaneously the 1/R. West Kent and 2/K.O.S.B. of the 13th Brigade advanced round the northern slope of Hill 135. Air photographs had shown on the reverse slope two belts of wire running southward from Count's Wood to protect the gun-pits, 300 yards in rear. As there could be no certainty that this wire had been effectively cut, Br.-General Jones had determined to avoid a frontal advance against it and instead to swing south-east from the intermediate line, the right battalion advancing through and parallel to the belts of wire and the left capturing from the north flank the line of guns in the Bois du Goulot. The Scottish Borderers on the left met with little resistance in Thélus Trench. Moving astride it through the Bois de Bonval, the left company rushed the quarries at the lower end of the wood and captured 200 men, two 21-cm. howitzers, and four machine guns. The West Kent captured its section of Thélus Trench without difficulty and also took Count's Wood, which had been reduced to tree-stumps. Two companies then wheeled

"sticks in the air and hurrying from group to group to give instructions. "For a few minutes the artillery fire almost ceased on both sides and "complete silence fell upon the battlefield, as if all were lost in wonder. "The battle itself seemed to hold its breath."

¹ Of the eight tanks of No. 12 Coy., "D" Battalion, four were to have supported the 6th Canadian Brigade in the attack on Thélus, two passing round either end of the village. The other section, in support of the 13th Brigade, was to have sent two tanks along the intermediate line to Count's Wood, where the presence of a strong point was suspected. Then, turning right-handed, the tanks were to have rolled down the lines of wire on the reverse slope of the hill.

south-eastward to assist the Borderers in clearing the Bois du Goulot.

Ninety minutes had been allowed in the artillery timetable for the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions to organize a rough line of defence along the Roclincourt—Vimy track. This pause enabled machine guns to be brought forward, those with the leading battalions to the front line and those of the barrage batteries to a position which ran approximately along the Roclincourt—Thélus road to Thélus cemetery and thence followed the western slope of Hill 135 northwards, about four hundred yards behind the crest-line.

It seemed probable that the final movement would provide a severe test. The first belt of wire, in places 20 yards broad, and securely fixed on angle-iron pickets, followed the crest, while the second lay 200 yards down the slope. Both protected the line of concrete casemates along the upper edges of Farbus Wood and the Bois de la Ville, 200 yards further down the slope, and also the second-line position within the woodlands. The 1st and 6th Canadian Brigades were facing eastwards, but the belts of wire, the gun-pits, and the second-line position all followed the south-eastern lie of the ridge, so that a half-left wheel was necessary to bring the troops frontally up to their objectives. The barrages were therefore to lift in succession by sections from right to left, allowing half an hour for the right battalion to reach the first belt, an advance of 800 yards. As the rearward batteries were now out of range, the barrage was maintained by the advanced batteries alone. The experience gained at rehearsals enabled the movement to be carried out by the infantry without confusion, so that soon after 1 P.M. the leading companies were closed up to the barrage, which lay along the first belt of wire.

In front of the 3rd and 1st Battalions of the 1st Brigade, covering the front of the 1st Canadian Division, the gaps made by the artillery were insufficient. However, a number of new ones were rapidly cut by hand, and the two battalions were able to follow the barrage punctually through both belts.¹ Over the top of Farbus Wood the troops could see every movement in the plain, and during pauses in the advance the Colt-gun section of the 4th Battalion with the leading wave fired with effect on transport on the Vimy—Willerval road. The German guns were

¹ Twenty-four pairs of cutters and a number of wire-breakers (for attachment to rifles) had been issued to each of the leading companies.

captured without difficulty, the detachments having been driven to shelter by the barrage. So hastily had these batteries been abandoned that in one officers' dug-out luncheon was found untouched on the table. Patrols crossed the second-line trench and established observation posts along the lower edge of the wood.

The advance of the 6th Canadian Brigade, 2nd Canadian Division, was equally successful. It was carried out by the 27th (City of Winnipeg) Battalion, with a company of the 29th on its left. This brigade encountered resistance at the line of batteries, not only from a machine gun, which was put out of action by rifle grenades, but from a battery which opened fire when the 27th were within fifty yards of it. Thereupon the front wave of both battalions raised a cheer, charged down the slope, and bayoneted or captured the gunners. Continuing the advance, the second-line trench was crossed and the eastern edge of the Bois de la Ville was secured, 250 prisoners, including the commander and staff of the *3rd Bavarian Reserve Regiment*, being taken in various dug-outs on the way. Patrols were sent out to Station Wood and the north-east corner of Farbus, and scouts reached the railway line.

Meanwhile the British 13th Brigade completed the capture of the Bois du Goulot, moving through it from north to south. As the left of the West Kent approached, a gun-detachment in one of the pits along the upper edge of the wood fired point-blank at 200 yards' range till, covered by a volley of rifle grenades fired by men of the Scottish Borderers, a platoon rushed the gun-pit and captured the detachment. The other detachments, taken unawares by the outflanking movement through the wood, retired hurriedly down the slope under heavy fire. Nine guns and howitzers and a quantity of ammunition were found in the gun-pits.¹ A line of defence and observation, making use of the concrete emplacements, was then established along the upper edge of the wood.

Thus the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions had captured the whole of their final objective. As the 51st Division had not come up on the right, a defensive flank was formed running back to the intermediate line.² Behind the outposts in the wood the leading brigades set about the con-

¹ The 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions (including 13th Brigade) captured on this day 4 21-cm., 11 15-cm., 3 105-mm. howitzers, 12 77-mm. guns, and one unspecified howitzer, a total of 31 pieces.

² See p. 235.

struction of a main line of defence, a trench dug parallel to the lie of the ridge and utilizing the two broad belts of German wire as protection.

On the assumption that, once pushed off the ridge, the Germans might fall back to a defensive position some miles in rear, the Canadian Light Horse had been instructed to be in readiness to pursue them. A bridle-path had been marked with white tape, and at 1.50 P.M. two troops left Neuville St. Vaast, followed later by the remainder of "C" Squadron. The squadron was ordered to send small patrols to Willerval, which were to remain in the village if they succeeded in reaching it. There was, it must be confessed, no great value in such an action, because the enemy's movements could be observed without difficulty, and it was known that the railway embankment between Farbus and Vimy was still held, while other detachments of the enemy could be seen lying in the fields. Nevertheless, at 4.20 P.M. two mounted patrols emerged from Farbus Wood, crossed the railway beyond the village, and there separated, riding in full view of friend and foe over the open fields, one party towards the northern, the other towards the southern, side of Willerval. The northern patrol, 13 all ranks, charged and captured a party of ten Germans in the centre of the village, and then, learning from a prisoner that a machine gun was about to come into action, turned and galloped back, but lost its officer, five men, and several horses. The southern patrol met a line of German infantry and tried to withdraw, but only two men out of six reached the shelter of the wood on foot. Marching back to Mont St. Eloy, the squadron lost over half its horses from shell-fire.¹

As soon as the success of the operation was assured, the task of extending roads, tramways, and pipes across the quagmire up to the new front line was taken in hand, engineers and their working parties appearing, as if, like the army of Cadmus, they sprang from the ground. None of the artillery was able to get further forward than the original British front trenches that night. Over one thousand men of the Canadian entrenching battalions and labour companies were detailed to lay a plank road to connect the Arras—Souchez and Arras—Lens roads along

¹ The action of these patrols had a certain effect. The report spread among the Germans that "a strong force of English cavalry had broken "through into Willerval", and a battalion, the *I./225th Reserve*, newly arrived in Arleux, was ordered to "recapture" the place at once.

the right boundary of the 1st Canadian Division. They were also set to clear and repair the Neuville St. Vaast—Thélus and Arras—Lens roads, which had lain derelict for over two years, and to bridge the trenches which crossed them. German prisoners acted as stretcher-bearers, carrying back the wounded to the dressing stations in the subways.¹

The work was undisturbed by a counter-attack which was in process of development. No sooner had the survivors of the mounted patrols returned from Willerval than observers on the ridge reported German infantry moving towards Vimy and, at 5.30 P.M., more ("three battalions "in lines 100 yards apart") advancing from the direction of Acheville, and a third movement ("one and a half "battalions") from Arleux towards Farbus. Despite the fire of heavy artillery and of machine guns from the ridge, widely extended lines of hostile infantry were seen to approach Vimy and the railway embankment south of it, shortly before dusk.² Yet the onslaught awaited by the Canadians did not reach even their outposts, and a bitterly cold night passed quietly.

¹ The casualties of the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions were approximately as follows :

		Killed	Wounded	Missing
1st Cdn. Bde.	{ Officers . . .	7	15	1
	{ Other ranks . . .	82	285	75
2nd Cdn. Bde.	{ Officers . . .	14	23	1
	{ Other ranks . . .	265	767	39
3rd Cdn. Bde.	{ Officers . . .	15	33	..
	{ Other ranks . . .	993		
4th Cdn. Bde.	{ Officers . . .	6	21	4
	{ Other ranks . . .	141	505	73
5th Cdn. Bde.	{ Officers . . .	7	31	..
	{ Other ranks . . .	113	353	251
6th Cdn. Bde.	{ Officers . . .	6	17	..
	{ Other ranks . . .	84	420	..
British 18th Bde.	{ Officers . . .	3	5	..
	{ Other ranks . . .	38	318	17

For casualties of the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions, and total casualties of the Canadian Corps, see p. 342.

The losses of the 6th Canadian Brigade above include about 133 casualties suffered next day.

² For details of the German counter-attack intended to be delivered against Hill 135 concentrically from Petit Vimy and Farbus see Note at end of Chapter XIII.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BATTLES OF ARRAS 1917: THE BATTLE OF VIMY RIDGE (*concluded*), 10TH-14TH APRIL

(Maps 3, 7, 8, 10 ; Sketches 12, 13, 15, 16)

THE STRUGGLE FOR HILL 145 9TH-10TH APRIL

IN the northern half of the battlefield the presence of a force of Germans on the summit of Hill 145 prevented any such freedom of movement as the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions enjoyed further south. About 9 A.M. the 42nd Battalion on the left of the 3rd Canadian Division, realizing that the 11th Brigade had not crossed the summit, threw back a defensive flank from the Bois de la Folie to the German third trench. Touch was eventually gained with the 11th Brigade here, but as a precautionary measure the defensive flank was continued back to the original front line and the trenches leading northward were blocked. Princess Patricia's Canadian L.I. took over part of the 42nd's sector in order to enable it to man this new front. Both these battalions suffered continual losses from the fire of machine guns and snipers on the summit of the hill, and those of the 12th Brigade, on the left of the 11th, were also harassed.

Throughout the morning deadlock continued. Despite the temptation to hasten the capture of the summit, the situation was handled with great patience by the headquarters of the 4th Canadian Division and of its brigades. Owing to fire from the uncaptured section of the German front trench it was impossible to obtain information as to the whereabouts of the advanced flanks of the 11th Brigade; consequently, a renewed bombardment with artillery might have endangered them. At 1 P.M., however, the fire of Stokes mortars and a machine-gun barrage

enabled parties of bombers to work along the front trench and to secure it, with 60 prisoners and two machine guns. The wire was found to be in a fair state of repair, a fact which helped to explain the failure of the first assault. In the meantime, shortly after midday, the 46th (South Saskatchewan) and 47th (Western Ontario) Battalions of the 10th Brigade were placed at the disposal of the 12th and 11th Brigades respectively, and companies of these battalions were used to reinforce the inner flanks of the two brigades.

Maps 3,
10.
Sketch
15.

At 3.15 P.M. the divisional commander, hoping to force the Germans back from the near side of the hill before dark, sent forward to the 11th Brigade two companies of the 85th (Nova Scotia Highlanders) Battalion, newly arrived in France. Br.-General Odlum assigned to these companies as objective the trench and road on the near side of the summit. They were to have begun their advance after a preliminary bombardment of ten minutes directed against the second trench. At the last moment the brigadier decided not to risk this bombardment and ordered the attack to be modified; but it was too late for word of his intentions to reach the companies, which had moved up by the two tunnels in this sector and deployed in the original assembly trenches. Despite the absence of artillery fire, they started off across No Man's Land at 6.45 P.M. Crossing the front trench, now held by the Canadian bombers who had taken it, they went forward as fast as the mud would permit against the second, which they captured, killing or taking prisoner 92 Germans. Following up their success, they reached their objective without further opposition. Simultaneously, two companies of the 46th Battalion, attached to the 12th Brigade, advanced on their left and captured the remainder of the group of craters in the 12th Brigade sector beyond the German second trench, also taking a number of prisoners.¹ The fire with which the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions

¹ The number of prisoners sent back and counted up to midnight was 62 officers and 3,342 other ranks, but at that hour more were still coming in. Included in these numbers were 182 artillery personnel and 180 belonging to trench mortar, machine-gun, pioneer, signals, and other units.

The losses of the 79th Reserve Division are given by German authority as 80 officers and 3,393 other ranks and those of the 1st Bavarian Reserve Division as 112 officers and 3,021 other ranks, for the period 1st to 11th April. These losses do not include those suffered by the various battalions of other divisions put into the battle or those of the counter-attack divisions which began to make their appearance on the 10th. Nor, of course, do they include the casualties of the first stage of the bombardment.

had been harried all day now ceased and with it the steady drain of casualties.¹

The night was one of misery for the troops, but the sky cleared and the moon, not long past the full, gave light for a certain amount of reorganization to be effected. In the early morning there was evidence of some activity on the German side, but a short burst fired by a Canadian machine gun was the only sign of a German counter-attack on Hill 145, as abortive as that which was to have been launched simultaneously against Hill 135.² At 4.15 A.M. on the 10th patrols were sent forward towards the German third trench beyond the summit, and found it empty. It was occupied by parties of the 85th and 75th Battalions, just forestalling bodies of Germans who attempted to recover it from the *Hangstellung*.

As the battalions of the 11th Brigade were exhausted, Major-General Watson, commanding the 4th Canadian Division, had called upon the 10th Brigade (Br.-General E. Hilliam) to carry the attack through to the final objectives of the 11th Brigade. The 46th and 47th Battalions being already engaged, the task was allotted to the 44th (Manitoba) and 50th (Calgary) Battalions. Soon after midday they crossed Zouave Valley in artillery formation, and about 2 P.M. deployed along the road which traversed the near side of the hill. The barrage, a repetition of that fired on the previous day in this sector, opened at 3 P.M. on the *Hangstellung*, and both battalions, charging down with a determination that would take no denial, entered this trench almost immediately after the barrage had lifted. On the right, parties of the 44th pressed on through the

¹ The casualties of the four brigades of the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions which took part in the original attack were approximately as follows :

		Killed	Wounded	Missing
7th Cdn. Bde.	Officers	11	30	..
	Other Ranks	181	576	167
8th Cdn. Bde.	Officers	34		
	Other Ranks	995		
11th Cdn. Bde.	Officers	25	25	4
	Other Ranks	345	596	211
12th Cdn. Bde.	Officers	20	37	2
	Other Ranks	297	854	184

The total casualties of Canadian Corps during the period 7th-14th April 1917 were 11,297.

² See p. 339.

northern end of the Bois de la Folie. Within thirty minutes the brilliant action of the two battalions had cleared all the dug-outs in both trenches of the *Hangstellung*, capturing 150 unwounded prisoners and several machine guns. They had, however, suffered heavy casualties both in their rush down the hill and in the subsequent close fighting, the Calgary Battalion having lost no fewer than 11 officers and 218 rank and file.

After the capture of the *Hangstellung*, which gave complete command of the steep slope down to the plain, the 12th Brigade was able to move forward its right, so that the 4th Canadian Division could occupy the whole of its original objectives. As darkness fell the 47th Battalion took over the new line from its two sister battalions. These then moved back behind Zouave Valley with instructions to reorganize and re-equip for the attack on Hill 120 (The Pimple), for which orders had already been issued.

CAPTURE OF THE PIMPLE AND THE BOIS EN HACHE 12TH APRIL

The “ Northern Attack ” on Hill 120 and the Bois en Hache, which would complete the capture of the Vimy and Lorette Ridges, was to have followed within 24 hours of the “ Southern ”, in order to take advantage of the enemy’s disorganization.¹ As, however, the 10th Canadian Brigade, originally destined to capture Hill 120, had already been employed to assist in the capture of Hill 145, the northern attack was postponed for 48 hours. It was now to be delivered at 5 A.M. on the morning of the 12th. The 10th Canadian Brigade was to capture Hill 120 and the head of the Bois de Givenchy spur, and the 73rd Brigade (24th Division, I. Corps) the Bois en Hache.

Maps 7,
10.
Sketches
15, 16.

The northern slope of Hill 145 terminated in two spurs which spread like splayed fingers to the east and the north-east from the extremity of the ridge ; on the lower slopes of one were the northern houses of Givenchy, while the other was covered by the Bois de Givenchy. From both these spurs the Germans enjoyed observation up the Souchez valley and across the stream on to the slopes of the Lorette Ridge ; while machine-gun fire from the eastern one, the Pimple, was, as already mentioned, a constant menace to the troops on the long slope of Hill 145.

The units of the 10th Canadian Brigade detailed for the

¹ First Army Order No. 108 is given in Appendix 42.

assault, the 44th, 50th and two companies of the 46th Battalions, moved northwards from their rest areas behind Zouave Valley at 1.45 A.M. on the 12th. Crossing the valley immediately east of Souchez village, they climbed the steep slope of the ridge to the assembly trenches within a couple of hundred yards of the crest. They had rehearsed every detail of the impending assault so frequently over the taped battlefield at Château de la Haie that the ground, though difficult, held few secrets. An advance of two or three hundred yards would bring the leading companies beyond the German first trench and on to the crest of the ridge. They were to press on another four hundred yards to the final objective, the 44th and 50th Battalions to the eastern ends of the Pimple and Bois de Givenchy spurs respectively, their inner flanks maintaining touch across the gully between. The right of the 44th Battalion was to establish contact with the 73rd Battalion, the left of the 12th Canadian Brigade, in the German communication trench leading to the southern corner of Givenchy ; while the left of the 50th Battalion, reinforced by the two companies of the 46th, was to be thrown back along the northern slope of the spur to join up with the original front line of the I. Corps in the Souchez valley.

The assault frontage, the thousand yards from the left of the 4th Canadian Division north of Kennedy Crater to within three hundred yards of the Souchez stream, had been taken over from the 13/Middlesex (73rd Brigade, 24th Division, I. Corps) ¹ by a company of the 47th Battalion at dusk on the previous evening, and the leading companies of the assault now passed through into the assembly trenches. At 4.15 A.M. all were reported in position, although a quarter of an hour earlier the assembly of the two companies of the 46th had been detected and the alarm had been given. Heavy machine-gun and rifle fire swept No Man's Land, but it passed high over the trenches. The night had been very dark, and about 4.30 A.M. snow began to fall, driven by a strong westerly wind. At 4.50 A.M. the bombardment by the two siege groups ² of heavy and medium howitzers allotted to prepare the attack, which had shelled the communication trenches and the rear lines

¹ The 13/Middlesex had taken over this sector from the Canadians a week before the intended day of attack.

² The greater part of No. 4 (Double) Heavy Artillery Group, allocated to 4th Canadian Division, was available to support the assault and, in addition, the I. Corps placed 2 heavy and 3 medium siege batteries at the disposal of the Canadian Corps.

behind Givenchy during the night, was intensified.¹ Ten minutes later, at 5 A.M., the barrage of shrapnel from ninety-six 18-pdr. guns opened on the thousand yards of German front trench, and simultaneously the infantry moved out across No Man's Land, ready to rush the position when the barrage lifted.² The wind had increased in violence, actually helping the men across the morass of mud, while the snow blew thick into the faces of the enemy.

The barrage crept ahead with lifts of one hundred yards every four minutes; but so heavy was the mud that the pace of the infantry was reduced to about a hundred yards every fifteen minutes and they were left far behind. Nevertheless the barrage had done its work and enabled the assault to break into the position. It was still dark when the leading wave reached the German line. The first and second trenches had been almost obliterated, and the garrison, a battalion of the *5th Guard Grenadiers*,³ was found mostly lying out in shell-holes with small parties sheltering in the few remaining habitable dug-outs. The mud in the trenches was so thick that gaps of a hundred yards and more were left unoccupied by the defence, and through them the Canadians passed without serious opposition.

Darkness and snow limited visibility to ten or fifteen yards. In the close fighting which consequently developed,

¹ In addition 42 gas drums were discharged from Livens projectors into Givenchy at 1 A.M. by "F" Special Company R.E. A number of bodies of gassed Germans were subsequently found in the cellars.

² The field artillery that took part in this operation was: 72 18-pdr. guns of the Reserve Divisional artillery (originally Lahore Division artillery), Canadian Corps (XVIII. and CCXLII. Army and the XI. Brigades R.F.A.), 24 18-pdr. guns of 24th Division artillery, I. Corps (CXLVII. Army and one battery of XIV. Army Brigades R.F.A.). The 4.5-inch howitzer batteries of these brigades shelled trench junctions and strong points behind the barrage.

³ See Note at end of Chapter. The *4th Guard Division* began to arrive in the battle zone from Tournai to relieve the *16th Bavarian Division* on the evening of 10th April. The continuation of the British offensive to clear the ridge at Givenchy was expected, and two battalions, *I./93rd Reserve* and *III./5th Guard Grenadiers* were put in at once to relieve the exhausted *11th* and *14th Bavarian Regiments* in position there, the former from a point in the front line 350 yards south of Hill 145—Souchez road to the five cross-roads (exclusive) at Irish Crater, the *Guard Grenadiers* continuing the line to the railway (exclusive) in the Souchez valley. The brunt of the 10th Canadian Brigade's assault was therefore taken by the *Guard* battalion, only 150 yards of the right of the *44th Canadian Battalion* coming against the right company of the *93rd Reserve*.

The remainder of the *4th Guard Division* was kept back in the second and third positions east of Givenchy and between Avion and Méricourt.

the skill and courage of the Canadians overcame all resistance. By 6 A.M. the Manitoba battalion, passing either side of the large group of craters in No Man's Land, had fought its way through to the quarry on the high ground of the Pimple and rushed the dug-outs. Lewis guns accounted for about one hundred of the enemy who attempted to escape down the hillside to Givenchy, and 77 prisoners were taken. In the bad light the leading lines went down nearly three hundred yards beyond the objective; but this error was rectified later. The Calgary battalion made equally successful progress through the squelching mud and the tree-stumps of the Bois de Givenchy. No formed body of resistance was encountered, and individual Germans who faced the storm and onslaught were either bayoneted or taken prisoner, the final objective here being reached about 5.45 A.M.¹ The two companies of the 46th suffered a number of casualties from rifle fire in crossing No Man's Land; but, aided by the snowstorm, quickly overcame the opposition. The leading company lost direction and became entangled in the main assault on the right; the rear company, however, reached the objective along the northern slope of the spur overlooking the Souchez stream and sited Lewis-gun posts there, making secure the left flank of the 50th Battalion.²

With daylight the storm ceased and the sun rose into a clear sky. The battalions of the 10th Canadian Brigade which had captured two most important features of the Vimy Ridge within three days were now able to contemplate the results of their achievement. To their right lay the summit of Hill 145 which they had overrun 36 hours previously, and to their front they overlooked the plain of Douai stretching away to the eastern horizon. Angres, Avion, and the conglomeration of houses and slag heaps forming the suburbs of Lens were in full view, and transport

¹ German *Sixth Army* headquarters had directed that no immediate local counter-attacks were to be delivered to hold the high ground on the ridge, as the withdrawal to the Avion—Méricourt line, ordered on 11th, was to take place during the night 12th/13th. See Note at end of Chapter.

² The casualties of the battalions which assaulted the Pimple and the Bois de Givenchy spur were :

		Killed	Wounded	Missing
44th Battalion	Officers . . .	1	5	2
	Other Ranks . . .	27	70	18
50th Battalion	Officers . . .	1	2	1
	Other Ranks . . .	3	38	8
46th Battalion	Officers . . .	1	4	..
	Other Ranks . . .	25	78	..

and groups of men afoot could be seen hurrying back towards them.

The leading companies established a line of defence along the final objective, while those in rear entrenched 300 yards further back to form the main line of resistance. For the moment the right flank was in the air, as, owing to bad light and lack of liaison, a platoon of the 73rd Battalion which was to have attacked in line with the 44th had not advanced. As a result a pocket of Germans held out between the flanks of the 44th Battalion and the 12th Brigade, and a bombing party of the 73rd failed in its attempt to overcome this resistance.

The Bois en Hache, a small wood of irregular shape, covered the eastern end of the Lorette Ridge. For some four hundred yards it fringed the high ground, across which ran the German front trench. This represented the last German foothold on the Lorette Ridge, and its capture, with that of the Pimple, would enable the British and Canadian observers to overlook the German trenches spanning the Souchez valley from Givenchy to Angres. The assault, simultaneous with that against the Pimple and Bois de Givenchy spurs, was to be delivered by two battalions of the 73rd Brigade (Br.-General W. J. Dugan), each on a frontage of 500 yards. The 2/Leinster was ordered to carry the southern and centre sections of the wood and the 9/R. Sussex the northern corner of it as well as the open slope beyond. Their objective was the German first trench which would be consolidated as a main line of resistance, while the leading waves moved down the wooded slope and open hillside to the German second trench two hundred yards below. This was to be occupied as a line of outposts and observation.

The leading companies moved out at 4.35 A.M., the front lines deploying beyond the gaps in the wire, the rear lines extending in front of the parapet of the front trench. At 5 A.M. the barrage¹ opened on the German front trench and the assaulting companies began their advance across No Man's Land, in black darkness. The craters and puddled shell-holes, edged with soft mud two or three feet deep, rendered progress laborious, and as the lines approached

¹ The artillery placed at the disposal of the 24th Division for this operation was :

Heavy artillery : 2 batteries heavy howitzers (8-inch and 9.2-inch) ;
5 batteries 6-inch howitzers ; 1 battery 60-pdr. guns.

Field artillery : 18-pdrs., 46, 4.5-inch howitzers, 18 ; *i.e.* the CVI., CCLXXXII. and part of the CVII. Brigades R.F.A.

the first trench machine-gun and rifle fire opened on them. Fortunately, the blinding snow and the barrage lessened its effect, whilst the wire formed no obstacle. Nevertheless, the Sussex suffered sixty casualties, including five officers, during these critical minutes. At 5.10 A.M., when the barrage lifted, the assaulting troops entered the trench. A number of Germans were captured, and the survivors retreated in haste to the second trench along the lower end of the wood.

As the weather cleared after daylight, the leading lines of the Leinster, pressing on down the wooded slope, were enfiladed by machine-gun fire from south of the Souchez stream, and encountered strong resistance on approaching the second trench. Their ranks were broken by losses, and all the officers with the leading waves became casualties. Nevertheless, the survivors, grouped into small parties, fought their way in with the bomb at two points and held their ground. The Sussex also suffered considerably but was likewise able to establish itself in parts of the second trench.¹ Several minor counter-attacks were repulsed, but the troops which had obtained a footing in the second trench were withdrawn when the original German first trench had been consolidated as the new main line of resistance, with the assistance of the 129th Field Company R.E. The 12/Sherwood Foresters (Pioneers) dug a communication trench through the mud of No Man's Land.

The enemy had now been driven from the edge of the spur; his trenches below were completely dominated; and the approaches to them from Liévin, Lens, and Avion were exposed. No counter-attack seemed possible in these circumstances, and the British troops, masters of the situation, awaited the German withdrawal which now appeared inevitable.

EXPLOITATION OF THE VICTORY

The line of the Canadian Corps along the captured ridge had meanwhile been slightly readjusted. On the evening of the 10th the British 13th Brigade had been withdrawn

¹ The casualties of the two battalions during the attack were :

			Killed	Wounded	Missing
2/Leinster	{ Officers	.	4	6	..
	{ Other Ranks	.	48	155	3
9/R. Sussex	{ Officers	.	5	4	..
	{ Other Ranks	.	40	67	..

to rejoin the 5th Division in corps reserve. This reserve was held ready to meet a possible counter-attack expected from the Bois de l'Hirondelle and Givenchy against the northern flank of the Canadian Corps.¹ To assist the 2nd Canadian Division to fill the gap left by the 13th Brigade, the 1st Canadian Division had taken over 600 yards of front up to Heroes Wood (exclusive). The First Army had also, according to previous arrangements,² moved forward its reserve, the XIII. Corps, to maintain touch between the right of the Canadian Corps and the left of the Third Army in the further advance of the latter astride the Scarpe. For this purpose the British 2nd Division had moved up into the battle line during the night of the 11th and taken over the 2,500 yards' frontage of the 51st Division (XVII. Corps), from the railway immediately east of the Maison de la Côte to Farbus Wood (exclusive). The 63rd and 81st Divisions moved to the Le Comté and Bruay areas in readiness to take over the remainder of the XVII. Corps front, should the advance be continued.

Map 8.
Sketches
12, 13.

It was evident, however, that nothing in the nature of a pursuit, nor any operation of consequence, could be contemplated until artillery and ammunition could cross the shell-torn battlefield. The original main roads were the only practicable routes, and these had been partially destroyed by months of bombardment; in some places mines had been blown below them, leaving great water-filled craters. Where the metalled surface still existed a deep covering of mud narrowed the roadway and prevented drainage, so that long stretches were indistinguishable from the ground on either side. The open country itself was impassable. The remains of wire entanglements, the shell craters and broken-in trenches prevented any movement except on foot, and even pack-mules, which took forward most of the supplies for the front-line battalions, had to use the roadways. Although over five thousand men had at once been set to work on the reconstruction and repair of these vital road communications, some days would be needed to make them passable for heavy traffic.

On the evening of the 10th, First Army headquarters

¹ See Appendix 44. The movement of the German resting battalions on the morning of 9th from north of the Souchez stream to Avion and Méricourt, coupled with prisoners' statements, led to the belief that a counter-attack would develop in this sector. The 5th Division was subsequently ordered to take over this flank of the Canadian Corps, the front of the 4th Canadian Division.

² See Appendix 29.

had ordered the Canadian Corps to occupy the line of the Bailleul—Vimy railway, but this operation was postponed so as to permit the organization of a more comprehensive action, including a simultaneous attack by the British 2nd Division (XIII. Corps) across the Bailleul—Farbus sector of the railway against Bailleul village, and also an attack against Givenchy. On the night of the 12th intermittent hostile shelling, rifle fire, and flares appeared to be normal, but early the following morning messages arriving at First Army headquarters indicated a general German withdrawal. A telegram from the I. Corps, received at 6.20 A.M. on the 13th, stated that a raiding party south-west of the Double Crassier, sent out to see whether the Germans were still in occupation, had found the trenches empty. The Canadian Corps reported that the Germans who had been holding out astride the Givenchy—Souchez road had disappeared, though machine guns in Givenchy had prevented patrols of the 12th Canadian Brigade from entering the village. These indications of withdrawal were rapidly confirmed. At 9 A.M. a lower trench of the *Hangstellung* was found deserted and was occupied by patrols. An hour later the 72nd and 73rd Battalions entered Givenchy, the latter battalion finding abandoned a 21-cm. howitzer, two field guns, and a number of trench mortars. At the same time a patrol of Lovat's Scouts of the I. Corps reported that dug-outs in the neighbourhood of Liévin were on fire. In view of these facts Lieut.-General Byng at 10.35 A.M. ordered a vigorous forward movement of patrols on the whole front of the Canadian Corps. Early in the afternoon explosions were heard, and from Lens and Avion flames and clouds of smoke could be seen rising.

By nightfall the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions had reached the Bailleul—Vimy railway and occupied Willerval, the 3rd had come up to the line Vimy—Petit Vimy—La Chaudière, and the 4th had secured Givenchy, with outposts in the Vimy—Angres position east of it. Similar progress had been made on the flanks, the 2nd Division of the XIII. Corps having reached Bailleul station and the 24th Division of the I. Corps having occupied Angres.

At 10.15 P.M. General Horne issued orders for the continuation of the advance next morning. Patrols were to keep touch with the enemy and all ground gained was to be consolidated; but the Army commander did not desire that troops of the I. Corps should become involved

in heavy fighting among the miners' cottages about Liévin and Lens. Prisoners taken on the 18th asserted that it was the intention of the enemy to withdraw to the Oppy—Méricourt line, the original third line, while holding the Avion Switch, running north-west from Méricourt in front of Avion and covering Lens from the south. This evidence was soon confirmed. Patrols of the 1st Canadian Division reached the wire in front of Arleux early on the 14th and found the loop trench strongly manned. At 9.40 A.M. the 2nd Canadian Division reported that its advanced guard was within a mile of Acheville. Further north the British 5th Division, which had relieved the 4th Canadian on the previous evening, was in touch with the 24th Division on the Souchez—Lens railway at the Cité de l'Abattoir. Shortly afterward the latter division entered Liévin and the Bois de Riaumont. By evening the nine-mile outpost line of the XIII., Canadian, and I. Corps ran from a point about one thousand yards east of Bailleul to the eastern end of the Bois de l'Hirondelle, and thence to the original front line north of the Double Crassier. The only opposition had come from machine guns and small rear guards. Another five guns, great quantities of ammunition, valuable dumps of engineer stores, and truckloads of bombs and tools had been captured. The Canadian Corps made good use of German guns and ammunition during the day, bombarding Avion with 21-cm. howitzers, employing the 15-cm. howitzers taken on the 9th for counter-battery work, and firing gas shell from 10.5-cm. howitzers at German infantry.

The First Army Order issued at 8 P.M.¹ summarized the information about the new German position and stated that the Army commander intended to attack the Gavrelle—Oppy—Acheville defences as soon as artillery could be got into position to cut the wire. The Oppy—Méricourt line, to which the Germans had withdrawn, formed, in fact, a barrier to an immediate advance eastward and was sufficiently distant—two to three miles—from the ridge to minimize the advantages of observation. According to prisoners' statements it was protected by formidable wire entanglements and although neither deep nor well revetted it was evidently sufficiently strong, occupied as it was by fresh troops, to turn an infantry assault unless preceded by a thorough artillery preparation. At the moment, and until the rear communications had been adequately repaired.

¹ See Appendix 49.

such a preparation was out of the question. Delay was increased by the rain and snow which continued intermittently after the capture of the ridge, so that the ground remained saturated. Mud shovelled from the roads flowed straight back, and the wheels of vehicles cut deeply into the surface : the work of repair had thus to begin again almost as soon as a portion of road was cleared and completed. In the circumstances, the continuation of the offensive, entailing a ceaseless traffic of artillery ammunition and supplies of all kinds, was clearly impracticable for several days. In the meantime the infantry consolidated the position on the low ground east of the ridge, and a front trench line was advanced as close as possible to the German position.

By its decision not to launch a counter-offensive the German command had accepted as irretrievable the defeat suffered on the 9th April. In expressing his appreciation, General Horne went to the root causes of the victory when he ascribed it to "soundness of plan, thoroughness of preparation, dash and determination in execution, and devotion to duty".¹

NOTE

THE GERMAN DEFENCE AND THE REINFORCEMENTS ²

During February identifications from raids had shown that the Canadian Corps was closing in and concentrating on the Vimy plateau. In addition to many other obvious signs of preparation

¹ "In communicating the Commander-in-Chief's congratulations, the Army Commander wishes to express to the G.O.C. Canadian Corps, the divisional commanders, and all ranks, his high appreciation of the splendid work carried out during the last three days by the troops of the First Army.

"The Vimy Ridge has been regarded as a position of very great strength; the Germans have considered it to be impregnable. To have carried this position with so little loss testifies to soundness of plan, thoroughness of preparation, dash and determination in execution, and devotion to duty on the part of all concerned.

"The 9th April will be an historic day in the annals of the British Empire."

Telegrams of congratulation were also sent to the British 5th and 24th Divisions.

² Apart from the First Army Intelligence summaries, the authorities for the following are the monograph, "*Die Osterschlacht*", and histories of the *261st and 262nd Reserve Regiments*; the *Bavarian 1st Reserve, 2nd Reserve, 11th, 14th, and 21st*; the *63rd Reserve and 66th Reserve Field Artillery Regiments*; and "*Bayern Schwere Artillerie*".

for the offensive, it was noted that an increasing number of aircraft flew over the German front defences. The significance of these facts was common knowledge. On the 1st March the regiments of the *I. Bavarian Reserve Corps*, between Givenchy and the Scarpe, were warned that within a short time they would have to withstand a great assault. Efforts were made to increase their power of resistance. As early as the 27th February the *79th Reserve Division* was brought in to take over the sector Givenchy—Thélus. Another division, the *14th Bavarian*, was placed in line immediately north of the Scarpe. The *I. Bavarian Reserve Corps* now became *Group Vimy*, with the *79th Reserve*, *1st Bavarian Reserve*, and *14th Bavarian Divisions* holding the front from Givenchy to the Scarpe. The three regiments of the *79th*, from the cross-roads on Hill 145 to the Thélus—Neuville road, faced the 2nd, 3rd, and half the 4th Canadian Divisions. On their right part of the left regiment of the *16th Bavarian* faced the remainder of the 4th Canadian Division, and on their left the right regiment and part of the centre of the *1st Bavarian Reserve Division* opposed the 1st Canadian Division.

An anti-tank battery (*204th Nahkampfsbatterie*) was disposed between the north end of the Bois de la Folie and Les Tilleuls.¹ The *79th Reserve* and *1st Bavarian Reserve Divisions* disposed of 89 heavy and 108 field guns and howitzers. In addition, three batteries of 80-cm. naval guns were in position in front of Hénin Liétard.²

During the early part of the year a programme of reconstruction and training had been drawn up on the principles laid down in Ludendorff's text-book. This involved the creation of a deep fortified zone for a mobile defence, instead of the former rigid method. It entailed the excavation of extra dug-outs in the intermediate and second lines, the building of concrete machine-gun emplacements in the intervening ground, and the construction of concrete shelters in the front system to replace deep mined dug-outs, which were now considered to be man-traps.

Although the offensive was foreseen as early as February, this programme hardly got beyond the paper stage. Shortage of labour, wintry weather which prevented concrete from setting, fears that if the front-line garrison were too much thinned the British would realize what had been done and alter their tactics accordingly, the speed with which the British aircraft photographed new work in the chalk and thus drew destructive fire upon it, are all advanced as reasons for this neglect of orders. Reconstruction of artillery dispositions was equally backward. Batteries were still grouped in lines, easy to see from the air and easy to gas, instead of being distributed in depth.

The demands on labour must certainly have been heavy. The garrison itself could do no more than maintain existing defences. At the same time, the completion of the third line through Méricourt, Acheville, Arleux, Oppy, and Gavrelle was being hurried on, and

¹ The guns were of 77-mm. calibre, and fired armour-piercing shell. Two of the four were destroyed in the preliminary bombardment. The other two, at Les Tilleuls, fired for twenty minutes after the launch of the assault, and were afterwards captured ("Res. Feld. Art. Regt. No. 63").

² The total artillery on the battle front is given on p. 182. It will be noted, however, that no piece of more than 20-cm. is there included, and it is possible there were some others exceeding this calibre in addition to the naval guns at Hénin Liétard.

the Wotan Line, some five thousand yards further east, was being constructed, in case the ridge should have to be abandoned.

The absence of reserves behind the Arras—Vimy front was, as already stated, an outstanding failure. The court of enquiry ordered by O.H.L. into what Hindenburg describes as the *Debakel* of Arras found that, though there had been no lack of warning, "*Sixth Army* " headquarters did not consider the offensive to be imminent", and that the five counter-attack divisions had not been brought near enough to the front, to "answer the enemy's break-through by an "immediate counter-attack". Even the local reserves, the third battalions of regiments in line, were in the view of Crown Prince Rupprecht held too far back. The court also found that the available artillery "had not been put in either in sufficient time or quantity", thus allowing the British artillery to carry out its programme undisturbed. The delays in ammunition supply compelled the batteries to use the gas shell which had been accumulated in great quantities for the operation on the northern slope of Hill 145,¹ though in the high westerly wind it could be employed only against targets some distance behind the British front.

It may be assumed that much of this neglect was due to miscalculation on the part of Colonel-General von Falkenhausen and his Chief of the Staff, Colonel von Nagel, as to the date of the offensive. That in itself does not, however, suffice to explain the complete breakdown of the machinery. Another cause appears to have been the assumption of *Sixth Army* headquarters that the battle would follow a course similar to that of the Somme, with fighting in the battle zone which might last for days or even weeks. The evidence in favour of this view is that, when the five counter-attack divisions were placed at the disposal of General von Falkenhausen on the 3rd April, he informed them that they were to be "ready to relieve the front divisions during the course of a long—"drawn-out defensive battle", and made no mention of the possibility of a counter-attack. At dawn on the 9th April, when they were still fifteen to twenty miles from the battlefield, their orders remained unchanged, with the exception of those of a few battalions. To meet the offensive he ordered all available resting battalions of flank divisions and three from his Army reserve at Lille to block the flanks of a possible break-through and thus force the assault into a narrowing pocket, the system on which the previous British offensives had been encountered. Two battalions were placed at the disposal of the *79th Reserve Division*, and three at that of the *1st Bavarian Reserve*.

At 11 A.M. on the 9th the commander of the *79th Reserve Division* issued orders for an immediate counter-attack to recapture Hill 135. The hour was optimistically fixed at 3 P.M., but it was after nightfall before the troops were in position. The battalions available were one of the *262nd Reserve Regiment*, in the sector concerned, and two from the *56th* and *80th Reserve Divisions* respectively, which moved up from east of Lens. They were to advance south-westward, their right on the Lens—Arras road, through the Bois de Bonval and Count's Wood, and to recapture the northern end of the hill. The *1st Bavarian Reserve Division* was to assist, employing three battalions, *I./225th Reserve*, *III./6th Bavarian*, and *III./21st Bavarian*, all of which had been moved by train and lorry from the Lille area, where

¹ See pp. 311 and 328.

they had been in reserve. These battalions were to counter-attack through the Bois de la Ville and Farbus Wood and to recapture the southern end of the hill.

It was snowing and already dark when the troops for the northern part of the operation reached La Chaudière. There the commander of the *262nd Reserve Regiment*, holding the Bois de la Folie, unaware of the arrangements already made, ordered them to fill gaps in his own front along the lower edge of the wood. Counter-orders reached them too late; only two or three companies moved out from Vimy; and they did not get very far. The other half of the attack likewise failed to materialize, and its battalions, like those on their right, achieved no more than the closing of gaps in the defence.

Meanwhile, by order of the corps further north, *Group Souchez*, six battalions had assembled between Liévin and Méricourt, in front of the Avion Switch. Three of these were the resting battalions of the *16th Bavarian Division*; one of them, the *III./11th Bavarian*, reinforced the survivors of its sister battalions in the southern end of Givenchy, while the *I./14th Bavarian* and *I./21st Bavarian Reserve* halted some two miles in rear, behind the Bois de l'Hirondelle. The remaining three, two from the *80th Reserve Division* and one from the *56th*, occupied a line of strong points west of Méricourt.

These troops were in position by late afternoon, and, as they were backed by a strong concentration of artillery round Lens, it then appeared that the Avion Switch and the southern flank of the *16th Bavarian Division* might be considered secure. The fate of its neighbour, the *79th Reserve Division*, was, however, still uncertain. At 6 p.m. the *I./14th Bavarian* was ordered to re-establish the line on the northern slope of Hill 145. This counter-attack also broke down. Though it was to have been launched from the Pimple at 8 p.m., the troops did not reach this point till midnight. Advancing south across the gully above Givenchy, many of the men left their short Wellington boots in the mud, while others lost direction. A burst of fire from a single Canadian machine gun sufficed to induce these companies to abandon their advance. The companies which were to have made a holding attack on the south side of the sharp salient in the Canadian front also lost their way.

Although the counter-attacks had failed completely, the presence of eleven fresh battalions provided a certain stiffening of the German front between Givenchy and Bailleul. Early on the morning of the 10th O.H.L. directed that the whole front from the Scarpe to north of Lens should be withdrawn to the second line, along the eastern slopes of the Vimy and Lorette Ridges. Now, at Farbus this second line had already been evacuated. The commander of the *Sixth Army* therefore decided to launch a counter-attack through the village and to reoccupy this sector as soon as adequate artillery support was available. However, Crown Prince Rupprecht, expecting the offensive to be renewed at any moment and conscious of the unfavourable situation of the German front, forbade any such action. After consultation with the new Chief of the Staff of the Army, Colonel von Lossberg, he issued instructions for a withdrawal to the third line, the Oppy—Méricourt line, from Gavrelle to Méricourt, and thence the Avion Switch round the western suburbs of Lens. The movement was to be completed by dawn on the 13th.

During the night of the 11th and 12th the remaining civilians in the villages near the third line were hurried away from their

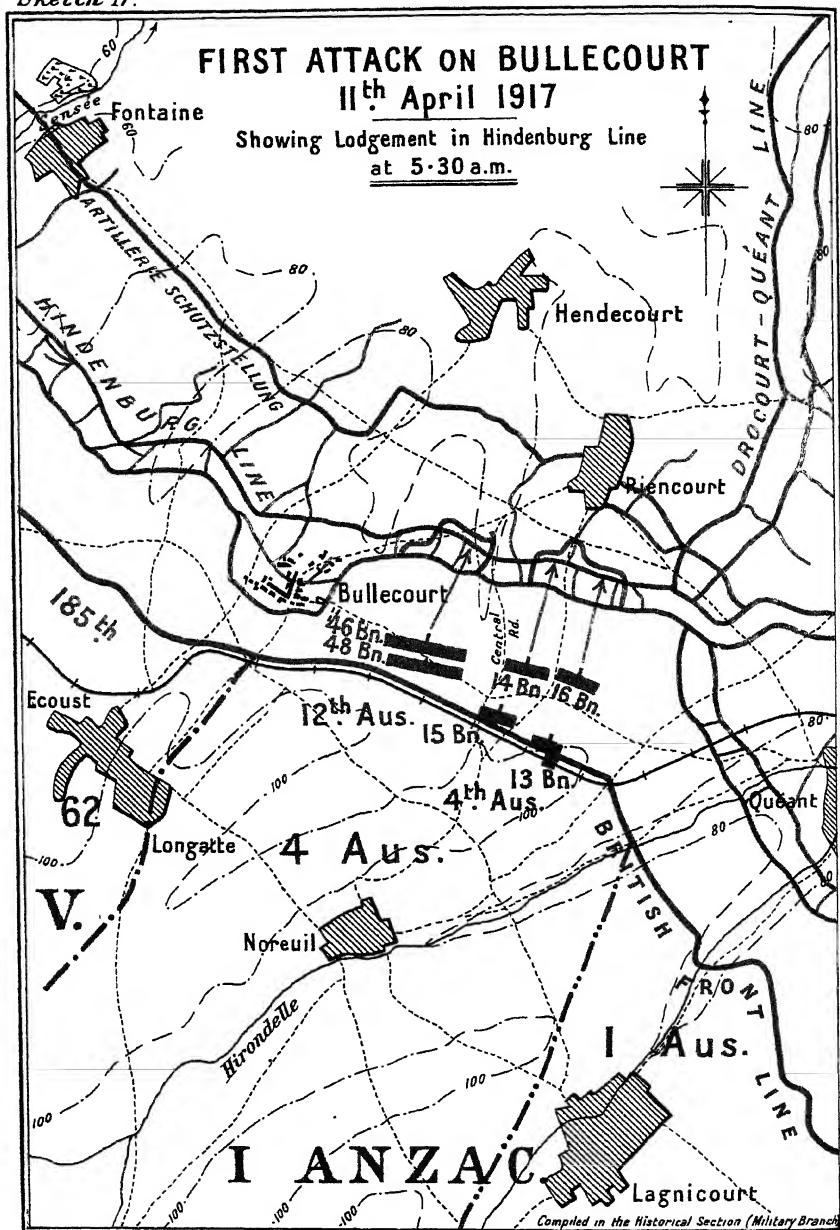
homes, and every available vehicle was used to carry back stores. The artillery withdrew, leaving only a small proportion in position. After dusk on the 12th the front-line battalions and the last guns in action slipped away, leaving only patrols to offer a semblance of opposition to the pursuit.

Early on the 10th the first regiments of the counter-attack divisions arrived in the battle zone. The *5th Guard Grenadier Regiment (4th Guard Division)* entered the line of the *16th Bavarian Division*, the *73rd and 164th Regiments (111th Division)*¹ that of the *79th Reserve Division*, and the *89th Grenadier and 75th Regiments (17th Division)* that of the *1st Bavarian Reserve Division*. By the morning of the 12th these reserve divisions, shortly to become the front-line garrison, were in position, supported by their own field artillery and by the heavy artillery whose belated arrival was so severely criticized : *4th Guard*, Méricourt to Achéville (exclusive) ; *111th*, thence to Arleux (inclusive) ; *17th*, to Gavrelle (exclusive). To the north the *80th Reserve and 56th Divisions of Group Souchez* had withdrawn from the original front between the Bois en Hache and Loos to the Avion Switch. These divisions, not having been seriously engaged, continued in line, supported by the *1st Guard Reserve Division*.

Such was the situation on the German side when the troops of the Canadian and I. Corps began their advance from the Vimy and Lorette Ridges on the afternoon of the 13th April.

¹ The *111th* was not a counter-attack division, but to the good fortune of the Germans happened to be passing through the area on its way north.

Sketch 17.



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Heights in metres.

5000/59

500 0 1000 2000
 SCALE OF YARDS.

Ordnance Survey 1939

Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

CHAPTER XIV

FIRST BULLECOURT AND LAGNICOURT

(Map 7 ; Sketches 17, 18)

THE FIRST ATTACK ON BULLECOURT 11TH APRIL

SIR DOUGLAS HAIG's plan for the Fifth Army to assist the Third by a north-easterly thrust into the Bapaume salient had collapsed when the Germans evacuated the salient and withdrew to the Hindenburg Line. General Gough was then instructed to press the German rear guards back to the Hindenburg Line and prepare to attack that position between Quéant and Bullecourt in conjunction with the offensive of the Third Army.¹ This was a more formidable undertaking. In the first place, the advance of the artillery to within effective range would be slow, and the supply of its ammunition over the stretched-out communications must be difficult for some time to come. Then, the Hindenburg Line itself was far stronger than the defences abandoned by the enemy. Finally, the Fifth Army had been weakened by the withdrawal of divisions and heavy artillery.

Map 7.
Sketch
17.

On the other hand, a breach of the Hindenburg Line at Bullecourt, on the immediate flank of the main offensive, would be tactically of great assistance to General Allenby. The Third Army was to operate south-eastward, with Cambrai as general objective, and the axis of its advance would be the main Arras—Cambrai road. Bullecourt was only three and a half miles distant from this road at Vis en Artois and less than two miles from Fontaine lez Croisilles ; and these two places were on the first objective of the Cavalry Corps, which was to pass through the infantry of the Third Army.

It was General Gough himself who suggested the inter-

¹ Appendix 26. The instructions actually say, " Quéant and Écoust ".

vention of the Fifth Army, and he was eager to do all in his power to aid the Third. He could, however, launch an attack on the Hindenburg Line on a comparatively narrow front only, because he had not the means to do more. It was tempting to include Quéant in the attack, because this village was the junction of the Hindenburg Line and the Drocourt—Quéant Switch. There was, however, a serious difficulty. Quéant also marked the beginning of that duplicated Hindenburg system of which mention has already been made.¹ If Quéant were included in the attack it would be necessary to break through four lines of trenches—a front and support line in each system—instead of the two west of the village. It seemed preferable to attack at or near Bullecourt, if possible gaining possession of the junction with the Drocourt—Quéant Switch by a subsequent lateral thrust. By Sir Douglas Haig's orders the 4th Cavalry Division was to be passed through the breach, if effected, and to join hands with the Cavalry Corps advancing from Arras.²

After the success of the 2nd April, which put him in possession of the chain of outpost villages from Doignies to Croisilles, General Gough ordered the most energetic preparations for the attack. "Every available heavy gun" was to be pushed forward, and no thought of risk was to be allowed to cause delay.³ On the 5th he issued detailed orders for an attack by the I. Anzac and V. Corps on a front of some 3,500 yards, of which the village of Bullecourt formed the centre. The second objective included Riencourt and the third, Hendecourt. Here the 4th Cavalry Division was to debouch, to join hands with the Cavalry Corps, which it was hoped would by then be on the line of the Sensée. A company of tanks had now been handed over to the Army, and it was proposed to allot five to each corps, two being retained in Army reserve.

General Gough considered that his intervention would be most effective if made simultaneously with the assault of the Third Army on the Wancourt—Feuchy line. He was therefore chagrined to learn from Major-General C. B. B. White, chief General Staff officer of the I. Anzac Corps, at a conference on the 8th April, that it would take about eight days to cut the wire adequately.⁴

¹ See p. 91. The foremost system was known to the Germans as "The Balkon-Stellung" (Balcony Line).

² See p. 180.

³ Fifth Army Order No. 49 is given in Appendix 34.

⁴ A.O.A. iv., p. 267.

The earlier wire-cutting had to be done by heavy artillery as field guns could not be brought up close enough until some little time after the capture of the outpost villages. Though a large proportion of the heavy artillery had been withdrawn, the Fifth Army was still fairly strong in this arm, so that 26 batteries of medium and heavy howitzers attached to the I. Anzac and V. Corps were available for the task. They had, however, been delayed in their forward moves, breakdowns having caused traffic blocks which lasted for hours at a time. The fact that trains to Achiet le Grand, and to Bapaume when that station was opened on the 6th April, were running late caused extraordinary congestion of lorries about these railheads, not easily relieved because, owing to the state of the roads, the lorries of the V. Corps could carry only half loads. Serious bombardment had therefore not begun until the 5th.¹

The field artillery, handicapped by a considerable shortage of horses, had moved up in relays. The 4th Australian Division, on the left of the I. Anzac Corps, could not put all the seven brigades belonging or attached to it into action until the 8th,² despite a successful experiment with traction by lorries, each drawing an 18-pdr. and limber and carrying a detachment of ten men, tools, and 176 rounds of ammunition. On the front of the V. Corps, held by the 7th Division until the morning of the 5th and then by the 62nd Division, the 18-pdr. batteries of both these divisions were advanced by sections to the neighbourhood of Croisilles and Écoust, and began wire-cutting on the 7th.

It was therefore not surprising that, though the wire had been damaged in places, no gaps could be found by the Australian patrols, who reported that east of Bullecourt its average depth was 30 yards. The operation of the Fifth Army was therefore postponed, and the wire-cutting continued.

Next morning, the 9th, witnessed the attack of the Third Army. The first reports which reached General Gough were of unqualified success, because the right of the Third Army, which met with comparative failure, had

¹ On the 3rd, the I. Anzac heavy artillery fired only 1,100 rounds, and on the 4th 1,695. From the 5th to the 8th it averaged nearly 4,000 rounds a day, and on the 9th it fired 6,025.

² In addition to its own two field artillery brigades, the 4th Australian Division had attached to it the I. and II. of the 1st Australian Division, the IV. and V. of the 2nd Australian Division, and the XII. (Australian) Army Brigade.

not yet begun its advance. It was galling to find himself helpless to aid in exploiting the great victory which appeared to be in prospect. In the early afternoon Lieut.-Colonel J. Hardress Lloyd, commanding D Tank Battalion—to which the company attached to the Fifth Army belonged—brought him a proposal which appeared hopeful.

In the operation now postponed it had been proposed to employ the tanks in pairs, distributed along the two-mile front. This was contrary to the tactical theories of the tank officers. Tanks so dispersed were easy targets and were unlikely to make satisfactory breaches for the infantry; if concentrated, they would, on the other hand, have a good opportunity to roll up the wire on their whole frontage, creating one wide gap instead of a series of narrow ones.

In this case the proposal apparently came from the company commander, Major W. H. L. Watson. He suggested that his twelve tanks should carry out a surprise attack on a front of about one thousand yards, the artillery not opening fire until they had passed through the wire. General Gough not only accepted the scheme, but somewhat startled its author by deciding to put it into effect on the following morning, that of the 10th, without any previous practice of co-operation between the tanks and the infantry. The tanks were in a quarry at Mory Copse, over four miles in a direct line from the front, and it was inadvisable to move them until dark, in case they should be discovered on the open downland by hostile aircraft.¹

Under the new scheme the attack was to be carried out on a frontage of about 1,500 yards against the re-entrant in the Hindenburg Line between Quéant and Bullecourt by the 4th Australian Division alone. The tanks were to line up in front of the infantry and penetrate the wire ahead of them. As soon as the Hindenburg Line had been taken four tanks were to swing westward into Bullecourt, followed by an Australian battalion, and to clear the village. The 62nd Division was then to push through to its original objective of Hendecourt, while the Australian right, assisted by four tanks, advanced on Riencourt. General Gough was not, however, fully assured that the attack would be necessary. Information from the Third Army and from some escaped British prisoners of war suggested the possibility that the Germans would evacuate the Hindenburg Line and fall back to the Drocourt-Quéant

¹ Major W. H. L. Watson, "A Company of Tanks", p. 45.

Switch. General Gough therefore directed that strong patrols should be sent out to discover if the trenches were held and to occupy them if they were not. In the latter case both divisions were to seize their objectives as quickly as possible.

The patrols did go forward at dusk, and found that the Hindenburg Line was still held in strength. On the other hand, the wire in the re-entrant was much more damaged than it had been two nights earlier. There were now several lanes right through it.

Orders had to be issued hastily and all details settled verbally. The commander of the 4th Australian Division, Major-General W. Holmes, decided to attack with two brigades, the 4th on the right and the 12th on the left. The left brigade had to capture the Hindenburg Line and supply the battalion which was to follow the tanks into Bullecourt; it therefore required only the two battalions which had been holding the Boisieux—Marquion railway since the 7th. The right brigade had the further objective of Riencourt, and therefore required all four of its battalions, the two which were resting having to march some seven miles from Favreuil during the night. Between the objectives of the two brigades there was a gap of some 500 yards, across a depression running at right angles to the Hindenburg Line which would probably be swept by machine-gun fire. It was hoped that the tanks would deal with the defences here, and that the brigades would afterwards be able to close the gap by extending their inner flanks.

The assault was to be launched, from a distance of 600 yards from the German front trench and perhaps 500 from the nearest points on the zigzag wire, at 4.30 A.M. (Summer Time), one hour and 48 minutes before sunrise. It was vital to attack before daylight, because the objective was in a re-entrant which could be swept by fire from the jaws at Quéant and Bullecourt. The artillery was to maintain a normal rate of fire until Zero, and then to put down a barrage on each flank.

The weather was such as will always be associated with the early stages of the Battles of Arras, cold and stormy, with flurries of snow. At 1 A.M. gas was discharged into Bullecourt from Livens projectors and 4-inch Stokes mortars. The two Australian brigades assembled in good time, expecting the arrival of the tanks. But the tanks did not appear. Minute by minute anxiety increased.

Six battalions, for the most part lying on ground thinly covered with snow, though some were in assembly trenches, were in deadly peril of discovery; the left of the 12th Brigade was within 400 yards of Bullecourt; and dawn was near. The assault was postponed, but still there was no sound of approaching engines.

The explanation of the delay was telephoned to Major Watson at divisional headquarters. The tanks were still two miles short of Noreuil; they had been caught in a blizzard on the downs, and though never actually lost had had to feel their way yard by yard; it would take them another hour and a half to reach their starting-point.¹

To wait for them was out of the question. The infantry would be seen long before their arrival, and the tanks themselves would inevitably be hit if they approached in daylight. It was a case for instant decision, and Major-General Holmes took it without referring to higher authority. "We must postpone the show. I think there is just time to get 'the boys back', was his verdict.²

Mercifully, there was just time. Screened by another fall of snow which blew up almost at the moment of sunrise, the troops hurried back to the shelter of Noreuil in no very good tempers, wearied by a night under arms and the strain of a long wait followed by an anticlimax, but having suffered few casualties.³

If, however, the fiasco was not costly to the Australians, their neighbours of the 62nd Division suffered needless loss through a combination of accidents due to indifferent staff work. On the 8th, when the original attack by the two corps was postponed, Lieut.-General Sir E. A. Fanshawe, commanding the V. Corps, had issued an order—a copy of which was sent to the I. Anzac Corps—containing the following paragraphs:—

¹ There is no official record of the hour at which this message was received, or of the postponement mentioned above. Major Watson ("A Company of Tanks", p. 47) states that the postponement was for one hour; the Australian official historian that it was for half an hour. One hour's postponement is almost incredible, as sunrise was at 6.18, and it was therefore daylight by 5.30. The 15th Battalion Australian Infantry states that it received the message, "the stunt is off", at 5 A.M.

Warning of the postponement can hardly have reached the infantry, or surely six battalion war diaries would not have passed it over without mention.

² "A Company of Tanks", p. 48.

³ Curiously enough, the German troops facing the Australians had not seen them. The regiment in Bullecourt had caught sight of them but was too preoccupied with what was taking place on its own front to fire on them. ("Regt. No. 120", p. 65.)

“ Although an attack on big scale will not be made on the 10th instant, the following instructions are issued with regard to the action to be taken by the artillery and infantry. Preparations will be made to carry these out on the 10th instant or at any time after that date, on receipt of orders from Corps H.Q.¹

“ (a) A bombardment and barrage will commence at Zero hour as for the big attack up to the first objective only. Strong patrols of the 62nd Division will be sent forward close under the barrage, who will endeavour to occupy the line of the first objective. . . .”

No order to carry out this operation was issued by the V. Corps; but on the 9th a telegram was despatched to the 62nd Division ordering the advance of patrols at dusk that evening, and at 11.45 P.M. a further message was sent containing the words, “Zero hour will be 4.30 A.M.”. This appears to have been taken as an instruction to carry out the operation.

Not being informed by the 4th Australian Division that the tanks had not appeared, the 62nd Division sent forward strong patrols from three battalions of the 185th Brigade. In several cases parties penetrated the outer belt of wire, but were then assailed by murderous fire. It was actually at 4.55 A.M., when they were within the wire, that word of the cancellation of the attack was received at divisional headquarters; but the patrols, realizing that something was wrong, withdrew of their own accord, under heavy fire. The casualties amounted to 162, chiefly in the 7/West Yorkshire.

There was, however, nothing to prevent the attack from being carried out next morning, with 24 hours to prepare for it instead of twelve. Lieut.-General Birdwood, commanding the I. Anzac Corps, who had been doubtful of the scheme from the first, renewed his objections, but these were overruled by General Gough after reference to G.H.Q.² It was obvious that the assistance of the Fifth Army would be precious to the Third on the 11th April, when a great effort was to be made to reach the Green Line on the whole front and pass the Cavalry Corps through.

Some slight changes were made in the details of the plan. After the capture of Bullecourt six tanks were to come under the orders of Major-General W. P. Braithwaite, commanding the 62nd Division, to co-operate in his division's

¹ The words in italics were underlined in the order.

² A.O.A. iv., p. 286.

advance on Hendecourt. At an afternoon conference at the headquarters of the 4th Australian Division it was decided that, as the wire had now been found to be partly cut, the infantry would not await a signal from the tanks that they had passed through it, but would advance fifteen minutes after they had started, independently of their progress.¹ Otherwise all previous arrangements held good. In the early hours of the 11th April the Australian infantry again took up its position, on ground now deeper in snow than on the previous morning.

The part played by the tanks may be dealt with first of all. Here we encounter a veritable legend and one of the most curious of the War. Others have had their birth in the gossip of troops or civilians, in ephemeral newspaper articles, a few in books not based on official records. This, on the other hand, is based upon the records of the Tank Corps, upon those of the Fifth Army, and upon the despatches of the Commander-in-Chief. The story may be given in the words of the war diary of D Battalion of the Tank Corps:—"Two tanks assisted in the capture of "Riencourt: two tanks led the infantry into Hendecourt". The southern outskirts of Riencourt lay just under half a mile, and those of Hendecourt exactly one mile, from the front Hindenburg trench. Actually no tanks and no infantry reached Riencourt, far less Hendecourt. If the Australian records were not conclusive on this point, the German accounts, which support them, would finally settle the question.²

One tank of the twelve was out of action, and of the remainder only four appear to have reached their allotted positions by 4.30 A.M. Instructions that the noise of their approach should be drowned by machine-gun fire were not adequately carried out, and it was obvious that the engines could be heard in the German trenches. Three of the tanks which were up to time belonged to the section destined to attack with the 4th Australian Brigade. The right-hand one bore to the right under heavy machine-gun fire,

¹ The signal was to have been given by the display of green lights.

² The evidence of the Australian O.A. is stronger than the records, because it was compiled not only from them but from information given after the War by participants in the action and by the staffs of the I. Anzac Corps and 4th Australian Division. As for the German side, there are good histories of the three regiments concerned, the 120th, 123rd Grenadiers, and 124th, all of the 27th (Royal Württemberg) Division, one of the best in the German Army.

developed clutch trouble, and returned to the railway.¹ The next also bore right-handed, crossed the front trench of the *Balkon-Stellung*, 500 yards outside the zone of the attack, and after a magnificent fight was put out of action by streams of armour-piercing bullets.² The next stuck for some time in the wire, and after crossing the first trench was wrecked. The last tank of this section, which was late, carried out much the same programme as the first.

The centre section, attacking in the dip between the objectives of the Australian brigades, consisted of three tanks, of which one was hit in the track and another in the cab. The third reached the wire, where it stopped for some reason, to be hit by a shell which exploded the petrol tanks.

The four of the left section were all late, and two were hit before reaching the trenches. A third came up to the starting point after the infantry had got in, and the officer in it was requested by the Australians to deal with a machine gun firing from Bullecourt. It did so effectively, but was twice hit and returned to the railway, where it was hit a third time. The last had been ditched, but was towed over the railway by one of the two which had returned from the right. It was now after 6.30 A.M., so, thinking it possible that the Australians had reached Bullecourt, the tank officer made for that place. The tank crossed the trenches and entered the village.³ Its engine, however, failed, and it was evacuated by the survivors of the detachment, who made their way out and reached the railway. All the tanks which were out of action were naturally heavily shelled by the enemy, and eventually two only survived.

The reports of tanks entering Riencourt and Hendecourt, followed by infantry, were probably due to the foreshortening effect of alternate swell and hollow upon the curving downland.⁴

¹ In "A Company of Tanks", p. 61, it is stated that it "glided along the wire". According to Australian reports, it stopped to fire soon after it had started and never approached the wire closely. A German map (Otto von Moser: "Die Württemberger im Weltkriege", p. 513) rather supports the Australian version.

² "Die Ulmer Grenadiere an der Westfront" (123rd Regiment) is the source of this information. On the British side nothing was seen of this tank, and it was believed to have gone on to Hendecourt.

³ This statement is to be found in both Tank Corps and infantry reports. The German map alluded to above suggests that the tank penetrated the wire but not the village itself.

⁴ The supposition that this was the cause of the error receives strong confirmation from a report by a forward observing officer of the I. Anzac Corps. He stated that two tanks, followed by 200 infantry, had entered

The tanks made no gaps for the infantry, but, despite reports to the contrary from the Australian brigades, it appears that they were of some service. Their noise and formidable appearance undoubtedly affected the nerves of the German infantry in the early stages of the fight, and the artillery concentrated its fire upon them, to the profit of the infantry. On the other hand, the whole scheme depended upon them, and from this point of view they were a handicap rather than a help. When they failed, the Australian troops found themselves committed to an attack on the redoubtable Hindenburg Line, with the wire only slightly damaged, no barrage in front of them, and no further aid from tanks. In the whole course of the War few attacks were ever carried out in such disadvantageous circumstances against such defences.

Yet the attack succeeded. At 4.45 A.M. the 16th and 14th Battalions of the 4th Australian Brigade (Br.-General C. H. Brand) went forward in four waves, overtaking the tanks as they advanced.¹ From the first there was desultory German artillery and machine-gun fire. Then, as the leading wave approached the position, hundreds of flares soared skyward, shedding their illumination upon the white ground, against which the dark masses steadily marching forward were all too clearly visible. Realizing now that they would have to make their own way, the officers led their men towards the gaps in the wire, which was actually better cut than they had expected. But, the first trench taken, the wire covering the second was found to be undamaged, and the only ingress was by the specially defended sally-ports and communication trenches. Through these the leading battalions, aided by companies of the 13th and 15th, forced their way, undaunted by heavy casualties. Then they cleared the second line with the bomb. Many Germans, probably scared by the tanks, which these particular troops had not seen before, fled towards Riencourt; but in general the enemy stood his ground and fought grimly.

In the 12th Australian Brigade (Br.-General J. C.

Hendecourt, and that a patrol of "native cavalry" had been seen west of Riencourt. This obviously refers to the Indian troops of the Sialkot Brigade, and, as will appear later in this chapter, no troops of the brigade approached within a mile and a half of Riencourt.

¹ A.O.A., iv., p. 296, states definitely that no tanks had reached the wire when the 16th Battalion passed through it, but that the one which did reach it had arrived and was temporarily stuck in it when the leading company of the support battalion came up.

Robertson) there was a slight hitch. Owing to an ambiguity in the orders of the 46th, the first-line battalion, the company officers waited for the tanks instead of going forward at 4.45 A.M. independently of them. At 5.10 A.M. a company commander telephoned to battalion headquarters that only one tank had yet passed the assembly line. The order was given to advance at once. The British artillery fire had now lifted off Bullecourt, to permit the entry of the tanks and the infantry which were to have cleared the village. As a consequence, both the 46th and the 48th, in support, met heavier fire than had the battalions of the 4th Brigade. The right of the 46th swerved into the zone of the depression between the objectives, tried to follow the one tank which had here entered the wire, and was mown down in the gap. The rest of the battalion forced its way through on its correct front. The 48th found the wire in front of the second trench uncut but struggled in, bombed right as far as the "central road" in the depression, and established a post there. By 6.50 A.M. both brigades had gained their objectives in the Hindenburg Line, except that the 48th Battalion in the support trench had been unable to extend its left beyond the Riencourt—Bullecourt road, and that the right of the 46th had failed. These battalions were thus not one behind the other, but rather in echelon and only slightly overlapping.

Owing to very heavy casualties and to the stiff resistance of the enemy, neither brigade was in a position to advance to its further objective, Riencourt on the right and Bullecourt on the left, though a party of the 4th bombed up a communication trench towards Riencourt for a distance of 150 yards. It was extremely difficult in broad daylight to reinforce the troops in the Hindenburg Line—actually one company of the 47th Battalion did reinforce the 12th Brigade—or even to send up any but very small parties with fresh bombs. Moreover, the gap between the brigades—the existence of which was a serious defect in the plan—could not be closed. Nevertheless, the Australians were skilled trench fighters, and probably capable of holding out till nightfall if adequately supported by artillery. Unfortunately, this aid was denied them.

At 8.10 A.M. Br.-General Brand, to whom the situation was perfectly clear, instructed his artillery liaison officer to put down a barrage 200 yards beyond the second Hindenburg trench and the same distance beyond his right flank. A most exasperating telephone conversation ensued

between the liaison officer and the group commander, who questioned the wisdom of this action. The causes of his doubts were the fatal false report that tanks followed by infantry had passed through Rencourt and gone on to Hendecourt, and an equally fatal and false report that British troops had been seen in Bullecourt. Everybody believed these stories except those who had only too good evidence of the truth, and, on the matter being referred to him, Lieut.-General Birdwood refused to sanction the barrage. These reports also led to an order from Lieut.-General Fanshawe to the 62nd Division to advance into Bullecourt, a task which, needless to say, was quite impossible.

General Gough was so convinced that the operation was going according to plan that at 9.35 A.M. he ordered the 4th Cavalry Division (Major-General A. A. Kennedy) to "push on towards Fontaine lez Croisilles and Chérisy". The Sialkot Brigade (Br.-General L. L. Maxwell) had already moved into the valley west of Écoust. At 8.45 it had been informed by divisional headquarters that Bullecourt and Rencourt were "definitely reported as taken" and that it was to go through. A dismounted party from the Lucknow Brigade, assembled well forward to cut lanes in the wire, at once attempted to do so three-quarters of a mile east of Bullecourt, but was dispersed by machine-gun fire with about twenty casualties. The leading squadron of the 17th Lancers, which had reached the railway, was shelled and driven back with a loss of eight men. The regiment itself was caught in close formation east of Longatte and was lucky in escaping without casualties, except for a few among the horses. That naturally ended the effort of the cavalry.

Meanwhile the Australians were fighting it out with no artillery support except for fire on distant objectives, and no help from the higher command. About 10 A.M. a concerted series of counter-attacks developed from all sides : along both Hindenburg trenches on either flank, against the inner flanks, over the open on the right, and down the two communication trenches east of the "central road". The 4th Brigade held its ground while its supply of bombs lasted, but when this began to fail it was driven from trench bay to trench bay. Br.-General Brand had decided that it would be sheer folly to send carrying-parties with bombs and small arms ammunition across the open bullet-swept ground. In consequence, the survivors were forced to

withdraw, leaving many prisoners in the hands of the enemy, and passing through an inferno of machine-gun fire which took a further heavy toll.

In the 12th Brigade the situation was even worse. The 46th Battalion in the first Hindenburg trench, always weak and now reduced to a handful, was ejected without having warned the 48th in front of it. The latter was therefore for some time unaware that it was completely cut off. Had it then surrendered in a body it could scarcely have been reproached. Far from doing so, it bombed its way down the communication trenches and cleared the enemy out of the first line. By now the artillery had been allowed to put down a barrage, and by the irony of fate was shelling the Hindenburg Line, rendering the trenches untenable. The senior officer, Captain A. E. Leane, first evacuated the second trench, and then, as the bombardment continued, the first.

So, at 12.25 P.M., "a full hour after every other battalion had left the trenches, the 48th came out—under heavy rifle and machine-gun fire, but with proud deliberation, and studied nonchalance, at a walking pace, picking their way through the broken wire, carrying a proportion of their Lewis guns, carefully helping the walking wounded and with their officers bringing up the rear".¹ It was all over.

The 4th Australian Brigade was almost destroyed, having lost 2,258 out of some 3,000 in action. The casualties of the 12th were 909.² The German infantry claim to have captured 27 officers and 1,137 men, while their own losses were 750.³

The Australian reports, unanimous in attributing the disaster to the failure of the tanks, also express the belief that had Bullecourt been first unmercifully pounded by artillery and then included in the attack, and had the whole attack been made under a barrage, it would have succeeded, and the position could have been held. Though nothing is certain in war, the course of the action supports this belief. Some scheme might perhaps have been devised for employing the tanks without depending so completely upon their success; but to stake all upon them appears to have been putting too much trust in a largely untried machine. However this may be, the last word must be

¹ A.O.A. iv., p. 340. Captain Leane, who was badly wounded, died soon afterwards, a prisoner of war.

² A.O.A. iv., p. 543.

³ Those of the 124th Regiment were the heaviest, 144 killed, 280 wounded, and 62 missing.

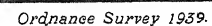
one of regret that such dauntless courage and resolution should have been expended in vain.

THE GERMAN ATTACK ON LAGNICOURT
15TH APRIL

Sketch
18.

On the 13th April the 2nd Australian Division relieved the 4th. That night the 1st Australian Division, on the right of the I. Anzac Corps, pushed its posts forward to within about a thousand yards of the Hindenburg Line. General Gough, who was already preparing a renewed attack at Bullecourt, had ordered the forward movement so that the enemy should not be allowed to discount the possibility of an offensive on any part of the Army's front. The advance led to some fighting, and two Australian posts were lost next morning.

The outposts of the 1st Australian Division (Major-General H. B. Walker) were now well down the slopes of the valley in which ran the Canal du Nord, on the right, and of that of the Agache brook on the left. The front was fan-shaped and at least twice as long as the average inactive divisional sector, measuring 13,500 yards, or over $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles. As the 1st and 3rd Australian Brigades had each only two battalions in line, the battalion frontages were on an average nearly two miles long. Each battalion had three companies in line, with the exception of that on the left, which had all four. The companies put out one or more piquets, each a platoon in strength, and these piquets were in general covered by small posts, though in some cases, owing to the extent of the front, the posts were between the piquets. The 1st Brigade had its reserve battalions at Doignies and Beaumetz. The 3rd Brigade had two companies from each of its resting battalions in support to the first-line battalions, while the remaining four companies were in brigade reserve, two north of Beaumetz and two at Morchies. The 2nd Brigade was in reserve, with two battalions and the machine-gun company in the so-called "main line of resistance"—the old German Beugny—Ytres, or R.3 Line—and the other two behind it. The artillery consisted of that of the 5th Australian Division (Br.-General A. J. Bessel-Browne) with the III. (Army) Australian Brigade and the 106th (howitzer) Battery attached. It was disposed in three groups, one between Hermies and Velu, one between Beaumetz and Morchies, and one in or just west of Morchies.



In this open country, where the doubtful havens of ruined villages afforded almost the only cover from view, the safest policy—at least in the opinion of the fighting troops—was to lie low and attract as little notice as possible. The outpost position was therefore seldom wired. The piquets and the sentry groups in front of them made themselves as unobtrusive as they could, covering the earth turned in digging their entrenchments with the spring grass.

The 2nd Australian Division (Major-General N. M. Smyth), concentrated to renew the attack on Bullecourt, held a frontage less than a quarter of that of the 1st. The right brigade, the 5th, with which alone this section is concerned, had two battalions in line, one in support south of Noreuil, and one in reserve at Vaulx Vraucourt. In view of the operations past and projected, the field artillery was also more powerful. It consisted of three groups formed respectively of two brigades of the 4th Australian Division, two of the 2nd with the XII. (Army) Australian Brigade attached, and two of the 1st, under the command of Br.-General C. Rosenthal, C.R.A. of the 4th Australian Division. In order to cut wire on the Hindenburg Line, these groups had been pushed forward down the valleys in which lay the villages of Lagnicourt, Noreuil, and Écoust. The foremost batteries were within a mile of the outposts, with very sketchy defences intervening. Since the attack on Bullecourt especially, those at Noreuil had been heavily shelled and had suffered a number of casualties. Nevertheless—such were the effects of trench-warfare on the mentality of commanders as well as troops—the commonplace precaution of infantry escorts had been neglected, and the detachments had not even their small establishment of rifles.

At 3.30 A.M. on the 15th April there was a short bombardment of Hermies and the battery positions behind it on the front of the 1st Australian Brigade (Br.-General W. B. Lesslie). At 4.5 A.M. the 3rd Battalion's sentry post facing the canal "Spoil Heap", which was to become famous in the Battle of Cambrai, saw a large number of Germans approaching. Lewis-gun and rapid rifle fire was at once opened, and the enemy promptly retreated. A few moments later all the posts of this, the left, company, were attacked. The enemy very inadvisedly fired rockets from the Spoil Heap, which brightly lit up his own troops. These were mown down or driven back in disorder, and the

pickets, a mere handful on a front of a thousand yards, kept their line intact. The 4th Battalion on the left was not so fortunate. The first assaults were beaten off here likewise, but the post on the road running east from Demicourt was overwhelmed by a *Flammenwerfer*, and those in the neighbourhood of the Bapaume—Cambrai road were driven in. Counter-attacks by the company's own reserves failed to restore the position, but the defence of Boursies was assured by the reserve company, and the line covering that village and Demicourt was reinforced by three companies of the 1st Battalion from Doignies. A post at a chapel on the Cambrai road some three hundred yards east of Boursies was very heavily attacked, but held its ground. At 8.30 A.M. Br.-General Lesslie gave proof that he was no longer gravely disquieted by the situation—though even then his action in such circumstances was exceptional and courageous enough to deserve note—by sending two companies of his 2nd Battalion from Beaumetz to support the harder-pressed 3rd Australian Brigade.

The attack on the 3rd Brigade (Br.-General H. Gordon Bennett) was prefaced by a brief but intense bombardment at 4 A.M. The 11th Battalion's posts beat off the frontal attacks, but the enemy passed up a gully between those of the right company, and overwhelmed them one by one. Even when attacked simultaneously in front and rear they fought on, particular gallantry being shown by that commanded by Lieutenant C. Pope, who was awarded the posthumous honour of the Victoria Cross. Their dogged resistance gained time for a new line to be formed in rear by the reserve company and two companies of the 10th Battalion. This ran from the left flank of the 4th Battalion, which had not budged from its position north of Boursies, and included most of the left company's original position, the right flank only being refused.

The right of the 12th Battalion was not assaulted till about an hour after the left, and then had no difficulty in holding its ground. Meanwhile, however, daylight had disclosed a swarm of Germans south of Lagnicourt. This, in fact, was the only point where the enemy broke the Australian front. As often happens, each of the units concerned—the left company of the 12th Battalion and the right of the 17th (2nd Division)—accuses the other, doubtless in perfectly good faith, of being the first to give way. As both were attacked simultaneously in overwhelming strength, and here without the warning of a

preliminary bombardment, it is probable that both were driven back at almost the same moment. The company of the 12th was broken into fragments by the force of the blow, and the enemy pressed rapidly forward into Lagnicourt. In some cases retreating Australians and advancing Germans were moving virtually side by side in the half-light of dawn.

The attack on the 5th Australian Brigade (Br.-General R. Smith) involved only the right battalion, the 17th. This unit was forced back, first to the Bullecourt—Lagnicourt road, and then to a trench behind it, covering the village of Noreuil and already held by the reserve company.

The enemy was now in possession of four batteries of the II. Australian Field Artillery Brigade at Lagnicourt. South of the village, too, he was within 1,500 yards of the 106th Battery near Maricourt Wood; to the west he had apparently reached three batteries of the I. Brigade, which had been abandoned by their detachments; to the north-west he was threatening the artillery in the valley south-west of Noreuil, where a haul of nine batteries awaited him. It was a very ugly situation.

Again, however, the self-sacrifice of the first-line troops gained time for the reserves to come into action. The most brilliant part of all was played by two support platoons of the 12th Battalion under an officer and non-commissioned officer who had won distinction in the attack on Boursies the week before, Captain J. E. Newland and Sergeant J. W. Whittle.¹ In the sunken portion of the Lagnicourt—Beaumetz road, not 300 yards from Lagnicourt, they disposed their little force back to back, lining either bank and holding the enemy's attack from both north and south, the latter coming from the southern houses of the village. A far more serious danger arose when a machine gun appeared in the sunken road on their flank. Had that gun come into action the men in the road would have been annihilated; but Sergeant Whittle rushed forward and killed the detachment with bombs before a shot had been fired. South-west of the village, on the Beugny road, the headquarters of the 12th Battalion under Lieut.-Colonel C. H. Elliott held its ground until at 6.20 A.M. a company of the 9th arrived to support it. The situation had become sufficiently clear for the centre and left artillery groups of the 2nd Australian Division to put down a barrage on

¹ Both gained the V.C., their work at Boursies being taken into consideration in the awards.

Lagnicourt and east of Noreuil. The heavy artillery, regardless of the danger in which its most advanced batteries stood, was also firing with great effect.¹

Thus the enemy failed to debouch south-eastward or southward from Lagnicourt. To the west his thrust was stronger, but it was met by a numerically stronger defence. Br.-General Smith, commanding the 5th Brigade, had learnt of the break-through about 5 A.M. He had then ordered the 19th Battalion, bivouacked south of Noreuil, to form a flank for the defence of that village on the ridge between it and Lagnicourt, and the 20th Battalion to establish itself on the high ground near the Bois de Vaulx. The 19th was just in time to meet two determined attacks, one up the road from Lagnicourt and the other up the valley of the Hironnelle and the ridge south of it, and to drive them back. Meanwhile south of Lagnicourt Lieut.-Colonel Elliott of the 12th had been reinforced by two more companies of the 9th. The 20th Battalion had advanced cautiously from Vaulx Vraucourt and Vaulx Wood, covering itself by patrols. Its deliberation was, however, fully justified by the knowledge of the situation which it had acquired. When, about 7 A.M., it arrived on the Noreuil—Morchies road, on the left of Lieut.-Colonel Elliott's force, the tables were completely turned. Since daylight the Germans in their self-created salient had been shot at from all sides. They were already dispirited, with little stomach left for a fight. At the first sign of a counter-attack they collapsed.

The counter-attack was begun, it would seem, by the companies of the 9th Battalion, on Lieut.-Colonel Elliott's initiative, and taken up first by the 20th Battalion and soon afterwards—as soon as it could get the barrage lifted—by the 19th from the direction of Noreuil. Observing that their opponents were flinching, eager to pay off their heavy score, the Australians on the flanks of both divisions pressed eagerly forward. Many Germans surrendered; many others were shot down; in rear formed bodies were heading back for the Hindenburg Line. The heavy artillery, apprised of this fact by a report from the air, laid every available gun on the wire to catch the enemy as he retreated through the sally-ports. There was

¹ The I. Anzac heavy artillery received warm congratulations for its work throughout the action from the Army commander, the corps commander, Major-General Holmes, commanding the 4th Australian Division, and Br.-General Rosenthal, commanding the 4th Australian Division artillery.

a slight delay in clearing the northern end of Lagnicourt, on which the British barrage still lay, but once that lifted the forward flow of the Australians was resumed, and the position was soon completely restored.

When the Australians reached their temporarily lost guns they made a discovery as welcome as it was unexpected. Only five, four 18-pdrs. and a howitzer, had been destroyed. Others had been prepared for destruction, but the charges had not been fired. With regard to the howitzer battery, a machine gun, formerly on anti-aircraft duty at Lieut.-Colonel Elliott's headquarters, had driven away the Germans who were clustering round the guns; yet it is none the less astonishing that so little damage should have been done to the batteries, especially those at Lagnicourt, of which the enemy had been in possession for the best part of two hours. The German troops reported that 22 guns had been destroyed by explosions in the bore, which explains why the German higher command regarded the operation, in fact a costly failure, with equanimity. The truth was that, with the exception of the five destroyed guns and one knocked out by shell fire, all were in action again as soon as the breech-blocks and sights which had been removed could be brought back.

On the thinly-held front of the 1st Australian Division between the point north-east of Lagnicourt where the breach had been made and the left wing of the attack east of Demicourt, the Germans lay out until dusk and then fell back to the Hindenburg Line. The Australians took up their old positions, though some of the most advanced posts were not reoccupied.

The Australian casualties numbered 1,010, including four officers and 353 other ranks missing.¹ Four German officers and 358 other ranks were captured. The tale they had to tell was remarkably interesting. In the first place they represented four different divisions, the *2nd Guard Reserve*, *3rd Guard*, *38th*,² and *4th Ersatz*. The attack, which had been hurriedly planned, had as its objects the destruction of the greatest possible number of guns and the mauling of the defence to such an extent that it would be

¹ A.O.A. iv., p. 393. As might be expected, three-quarters of these casualties were suffered by the 4th, 11th, and 12th Battalions of the 1st Division and the 17th Battalion of the 2nd.

² Actually no prisoner of this division was taken, but corpses wearing its badges were found north of Boursies, and other prisoners stated that it took part in the attack. That this was so will appear from the Note at end of Chapter.

unable to mount an operation against the Hindenburg Line for some time to come. The villages of Noreuil, Lagnicourt, Morchies, Boursies, Doignies, Demicourt, and Hermies were to have been held until the fall of darkness. This ambitious programme had almost completely failed, and with a loss more than twice that of the defence.

That defence had good reasons for self-congratulation. Without the intervention of a single platoon of the reserve brigades, it had brought the attackers to an early halt and then, at the only place where they had made serious progress, driven them back in confusion. At one point at least there had been lack of alertness, and one man running back from the sentry group to alarm the piquet had found difficulty in waking anybody up ; there had also been signs of panic among one or two detachments retreating from the guns. None of these incidents, however, had any effect on the situation. In general, steadiness and the cool handling of local reserves had been combined with good initial dispositions, on which the only blot was the failure to provide protection for dangerously exposed batteries. With regard to that one blot, the Australians had had the luck which their stout-heartedness deserved, indiscipline and the lure of loot in the battery positions having deprived the Germans of an excellent opportunity of destroying guns on a scale which would have had an important moral and material effect.

Finally, it is worthy of note that this incident was an example—perhaps the last in face of a major attack—of the pre-War British method of defence, before we had borrowed from our German foes and French allies the system of fortified localities surrounded by wire. Though the conventional orders had been issued for the piquet line to be held “ at all costs ”, this method was in the nature of things far more elastic than its successor ; yet it proved itself, when practised by intelligent troops, at least as tough.

NOTE

THE GERMANS AT LAGNICOURT

The information given by the prisoners was substantially correct. The attack was a hasty improvisation on the part of General von Moser, commanding the *XIV. Reserve Corps (Group Quéant)*. It had been conceived by him only on the 13th April, when he learnt

that the *3rd Guard Division*, in Army reserve, had entered his area.¹ He asked if he might employ it, together with the *2nd Guard Reserve Division*, the left division of his own corps, in an operation for the purposes already mentioned. There was another purpose, however, of which the British did not know and which would have astonished them if they had learnt of it: to aid the Arras front by attracting British troops away from it. Army and Army Group headquarters were delighted with the project. They not only gave their assent, but put at General von Moser's disposal the *38th* and *4th Ersatz Divisions* of *Group Cambrai* on his left, so that the attack could be extended almost to the Amiens—Cambrai railway. He had thus four divisions for his enterprise, though three of them, being in line, had to provide garrisons for the trenches.

The attack was carried out, from right to left, by the *2nd Guard Reserve*, *3rd Guard*, *38th*, and *4th Ersatz Divisions*, with, apparently, 21 battalions in first line.² Each division was followed by two or three batteries for close support, and by parties of engineers to effect demolitions. There were hitches due to lack of preparation and knowledge of the ground, the chief result of which was that several units were very late. The *2nd Guard Reserve Division*, which did know the front, with the *Lehr Regiment* of the *3rd Guard Division* on its left, was the only one that accomplished anything of note; but it was also the heaviest sufferer, losing over 800 men. The total casualty list was 2,313.

Crown Prince Rupprecht was not altogether pleased by the report on the action, which he did not receive until the 20th. He remarked very sensibly that instead of the corps commander laying down a final objective for the whole undertaking, each individual commander should have been given a zone and a free hand within it. Had he realized that five, not 22, guns had been destroyed, he would have been still less satisfied.³

¹ Curiously enough, he speaks of it always as the *3rd Guard Reserve Division*. The account is taken largely from his memoirs, "Feldzugs-*"aufzeichnungen"*", p. 268. Several histories of regiments are also available.

² According to Crown Prince Rupprecht, there were to have been 26 in all, but it seems that not more than 23 were engaged.

³ Rupprecht, ii., p. 148.

CHAPTER XV

THE BATTLES OF ARRAS 1917 : THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE SCARPE, 23RD/24TH APRIL

(Map 8 ; Sketches 12, 13, 19)

PREPARATIONS FOR A RENEWED ATTACK

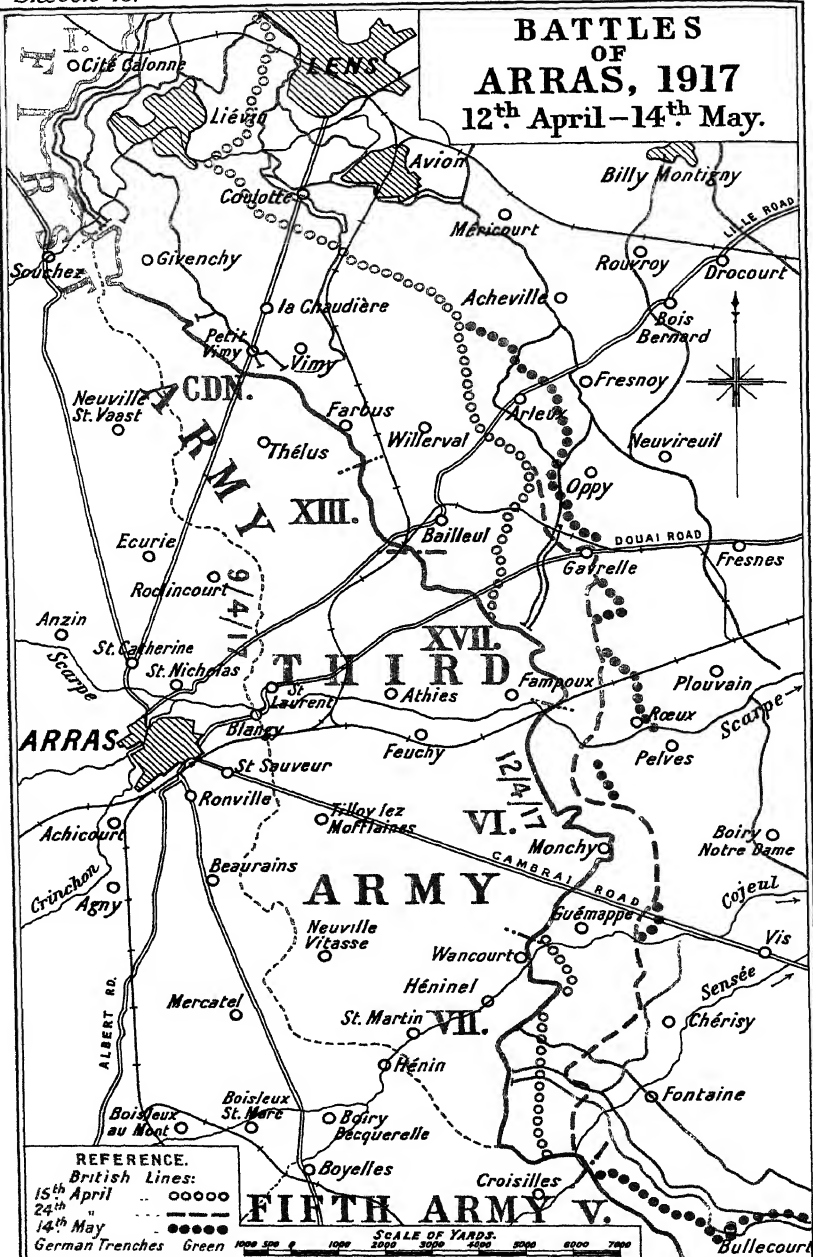
ON the evening of the 14th April General Allenby issued orders for the continuance of the operations in the direction of the Sensée, so that the VII. and VI. Corps should reach the stream between Fontaine lez Croisilles and Vis en Artois within 48 hours.

On the following day, however, he was informed of Sir Douglas Haig's decision that there should be a pause to prepare for a co-ordinated attack on a bigger scale.¹ He also received through the VI. Corps headquarters a report of a "resolution" by the commanders of three front-line divisions, Major-Generals Wilkinson (50th), de Lisle (29th), and Robertson (17th), at a conference held on the 15th April and attended by the chief General Staff officer of the corps, Br.-General Lord Loch. While not couched in the form of an expostulation, this statement registered a strong expression of opinion against isolated operations which exposed the attacker to concentrated fire upon his flanks. The course of action proposed was, first, the fortification of Monchy le Preux—which might well have been lost the day before had the Germans made a stronger attack upon the mere handful of gallant men who barred their way—and then the resumption of the offensive simultaneously north and south of the Scarpe. The divisional commanders were informed that General Allenby agreed with their proposals.² The problem of whether or not

¹ See p. 297.

² The matter was doubtless brought before the Army commander as an expression of their views. These views were, however, actually made the subject of a formal resolution.

BATTLES OF ARRAS, 1917 12th April - 14th May.



attempts should be made to improve a locally unfavourable position by minor operations preparatory to the renewal of a major attack was one which had appeared with particular insistence on the Somme in 1916. In most cases it can be decided only after consideration of the existing circumstances. Yet, generally speaking, the advantage of forcing the defence to distribute its fire appears to weigh down the balance in favour of including the especially commanding ground, strongly fortified salients, or other centres of resistance in the objectives of a general offensive instead of dealing with them by preliminary operations.

On the 16th Sir Douglas Haig held a conference at St. Pol with the commanders of the First, Third, and Fifth Armies, and outlined his plans for the next general attack, to be delivered on the 20th. The First Army was to break the Oppy line and capture Gavrelle; the Third would secure Greenland Hill north of the Scarpe, and south of the river the Bois du Vert, St. Rohart Factory, and the spur beyond the Sensée east of Chérisy; the Fifth would capture Riencourt and Hendecourt. As a preliminary the Third Army was to capture Guémappe on the 18th, by first securing the high banks of the Cojeul above it and then pushing a detachment down the valley into the village under cover of a creeping barrage.

These instructions had to be modified. On the 17th General Horne asked for a postponement, as the bad weather was retarding his preparations. General Allenby, for his part, stated that the corps commanders concerned, Lieut.-Generals Snow and Haldane, were not enamoured of the local operation against Guémappe, and would prefer to take the village in the course of the general offensive. General Gough desired to wait until the Third Army had reached the Sensée before he attacked Riencourt and Hendecourt. Sir Douglas Haig, as almost always, deferred to the wishes of the commanders on the spot. The operation was postponed until the 23rd, and the Fifth Army's rôle was reduced to assistance with artillery fire. Then, on the 21st, General Horne stated that the wire was not sufficiently cut to enable him to attack the whole Oppy line, though he could take Gavrelle. As this would suffice to cover the flank of the Third Army, Sir Douglas Haig decided that this Army should attack as arranged, but that the First should, for the time being, only be called upon to capture Gavrelle and carry out another local action between the Vimy—Lens railway and Hill 65, north of the

Souchez. The Second Battle of the Scarpe, as it has been named, was thus primarily a Third Army operation.

The great French attack on the Aisne, generally known as the "Nivelle Offensive", was launched on the 16th April. The results fell far short of General Nivelle's ambitious programme; in fact, at its maximum the progress made on the first day was far less than that of the XVII. Corps at Fampoux on the 9th. Nevertheless, over 10,000 prisoners were captured, and if the first day's reports caused bitter disappointment, it was in some degree because expectations had been extravagant.

Though the British offensive was temporarily suspended, the battlefield was not altogether quiet. In the early hours of the 16th April the 33rd Division (Major-General R. J. Pinney), which had relieved the 21st on the extreme right, attempted to win ground astride the Hindenburg Line in the direction of the Sensée. It did advance its right somewhat, south of the Hindenburg Line, but progress made in and north of the trenches was not maintained.

Round Wancourt Tower there was sharp fighting. On the 15th April the enemy occupied the ruins, which had lain between the opposing lines. He was instantly ejected by a platoon of the 1/6th Northumberland Fusiliers (149th Brigade, 50th Division), which dug in twenty yards east of the crest. That night four counter-attacks were repulsed. The following night, while the 1/7th Northumberland Fusiliers was relieving its sister battalion in heavy rain, the enemy rushed the tower. An immediate counter-attack by portions of both battalions was a failure, and Major-General Wilkinson forbade any further attempt until the tower and the ridge in its neighbourhood had been bombarded in daylight by every available gun. In the course of the War there were many costly struggles for ground the importance of which was exaggerated, but there could be no question of tolerating the enemy's occupation of Wancourt Tower. An advance of a few yards had given him complete command not only of the Cojeul valley but also of that further north, between Wancourt and Neuville Vitasse. In particular, the urgently necessary bridging work would have become impossible had he been allowed to remain where he was.¹ At 11.53 A.M.

¹ The engineers of the division, under the orders of the C.R.E., Lieut.-Colonel H. Rathbone, spanned the Cojeul with two infantry bridges on the nights of the 16th and 17th. They had made all preparations, including the forward storage of German timber and steel joists, to strengthen the

on the 17th two companies of the 1/7th Northumberland Fusiliers, assisted by bombers of the 1/6th, retook the tower, which that night was firmly consolidated.

Another lively point was on the north bank of the Scarpe, where the 51st Division had relieved the 9th. The 152nd Brigade established posts along the road which ran parallel to the river, but on the 21st its posts were driven out of the wood west of Rœux by a sudden counter-attack, with unfortunate results for the troops operating immediately south of the Scarpe when the offensive was resumed.

In addition to the reliefs already mentioned, the 15th Division took over the right brigade front of the 29th opposite Guémappe, the VI. Corps having thus once more three divisions in line. The 37th Division was transferred to the XVII. Corps and relieved the 4th on the night of the 20th April.

Preparations for the renewal of the offensive were pushed forward rapidly. Ammunition supply was more difficult now that practically every gun in the Army, with the exception of those on railway mountings, had been advanced, though in this respect the tramways were now able to give considerable assistance. And though the repair of the locks on the Scarpe had not appeared to be worth the labour involved, the lower end of the reach was closed by a temporary barrier of balks dropped between uprights, so that pontoons could be placed in the canal to carry ammunition up to Fampoux and to bring back wounded. The roads were in a wretched state during the first half of the eight days' pause, but improved in the second owing to the more regular arrival of stone trains, the allotment of extra lorries, and betterment in the weather. On the eve of the attack Br.-General J. A. Tanner, Chief Engineer of the VII. Corps, noted that the roads were "just holding". In many cases ammunition had still to be carried on pack animals over the final stage of its transport to the battery positions. The 20th April was the first fine day of the offensive, and though the 21st was

Wancourt road bridge, which the enemy had neglected to destroy in his precipitate retreat, but which had been shaken by shells, and to construct a new bridge for the heaviest traffic with a road diversion leading to it. These tasks the 7th Field Company R.E. could not, owing to the enemy's observation and machine-gun fire, begin until the morning of the 23rd. The old bridge was quickly reinforced, and it was by this that the artillery, as mentioned later, crossed the river. The construction of the new heavy bridge was much interrupted by the enemy's shell fire on the 23rd, but was completed by 4.30 P.M. on the 24th—a very fine piece of work on the part of the field company.

misty in the morning and windy at night, one enthusiastic diarist recorded that spring had at last arrived.

General Allenby ordered bombardments with gas shell to be carried out throughout the nights of the 21st and 22nd on batteries, groups of dug-outs, and hollow ways. These began with lethal shell at 7 P.M. and continued for ten hours, mainly with lacrymatory but with some lethal shell, 100 rounds from 4.5-inch howitzers and 80 rounds from 60-pdrs. per hour being allotted to each 100 yards of front.¹ There were also hurricane bombardments of the villages close to the German front by 6-inch, 8-inch, and 9.2-inch howitzers.²

The creeping barrage for the attack was formed wholly of 18-pdrs., one gun to twenty yards of front, lifting at the rate of 100 yards in four minutes and firing at the average rate of two rounds per gun per minute, though in special cases permission was given to double this rate for a period of ten minutes. The field batteries employed at the opening of the battle were still in action, except that the artillery of the 11th and 58th Divisions had been transferred to the Fifth Army. There had, however, been some adjustments to allow, when feasible, divisions to be supported by their own artillery, which naturally resulted in better co-operation. When this was the case, the C.R.A. commanded all the artillery attached to his division, but when the division's own artillery was not employed he and his staff were generally left out of action.³

¹ The programme had to be modified on the night of the 21st owing to the strength of the wind, ordinary shell partially replacing gas.

² On the other hand, a field-artillery brigade commander, who had an exceptionally good observation post near le Point du Jour, records that German batteries, plainly visible but out of range of his guns, were allowed to shoot all day without being engaged by the British counter-battery artillery.

³ The organization was as follows :

VII. Corps 33rd Division :		
21st & 37th Div. Artilleries,	CL. (Army) Brigade.	
30th Division :		
30th & 56th	„ „	CCXCIII. (Army) Brigade.
50th Division :	„ „	
50th & 14th	„ „	XLVIII. (Army) Brigade.
VI. Corps 15th Division :		
15th & 3rd	„ „	CCXXXII. (Army) Brigade.
29th Division :		
29th & 12th	„ „	CLV. (Army) Brigade.
17th Division :		
17th & 38rd	„ „	108th Heavy Btty.
XVII. Corps 51st Division :		
51st & 9th	„ „	XIV. (R.H.A.) and XXIII.
		(Army) Brigade.

Twenty-two tanks had been salved or repaired, but unfortunately three were destroyed by hostile fire on the 20th. Of the remaining nineteen, eight of D Battalion were allotted to the VII. Corps, two pairs to the 33rd Division and one pair each to the 30th and 50th ; and eleven of C Battalion to the VI. and XVII. Corps, one pair each to the 15th, 17th and 37th Divisions, and five tanks to the 51st, which in Rœux and the Chemical Works had the most difficult objectives.¹

Measured by their distance, the objectives were comparatively modest. The first, known as the Blue Line, included the Hindenburg Line to some three hundred yards beyond the Sensée ; the spur above Chérisy ; the western half of Hill 100, east of Monchy le Preux ; Rœux and the Chemical Works ; and—for the XIII. Corps of the First Army—the centre of Gavrelle. The second, or Red Line, began opposite Chérisy and included St. Rohart Factory, the Bois du Sart, Pelves, Greenland Hill, and Gavrelle.² The assault was to be launched on the whole front at 4.45 A.M.

THE ATTACK OF THE VII. CORPS 23RD APRIL

The fighting of the 23rd April is described by more than one participant as the hardest of the War so far. A fierce and fluctuating struggle was to be expected. After a pause for preparation and wire-cutting it was certain that the British infantry, still elated by victory, would break in at many points in its first onset. On the other hand, the conditions of St. George's Day were very different to those of Easter Monday. There could now be no question of surprise and only half the number of tanks were available. The German artillery, pin-pointed and in large degree put out of action at the opening of the battle, was actually more numerous now than then and not nearly so accurately

37th Division :

4th & 34th Div. Arty., LII. (Army) Brigade.

XIII. Corps 68rd Division :

68rd Div. Arty., LXIV., LXXXVI. & CCCXI. (Army)
Brigade CLXV. Brigade (81st Div. Art.).

¹ Thus the Tank Corps reports ; but actually twenty tanks went into action or attempted to do so. It can only be presumed that one more of C Battalion was patched up and assigned to the VI. Corps front between the Cojeul and the Scarpe.

² Third Army Order 183 is given in Appendix 50.

located, with the result that its fire was scarcely interrupted.¹ The German divisions were fresher than those opposing them, four out of the nine of which had been engaged on the 9th April. A rest of a few days was not enough for recovery from the shock and strain of such a battle, especially as the troops were seldom withdrawn far enough to reach comfortable quarters, and the weather conditions were miserable.

The 23rd April dawned with a heavy mist from the wet ground. The smoke of the British barrage and bombardment, in which smoke shell was mixed with shrapnel and high explosive, thickened this into a dense fog, lasting until about 8 A.M. Once, however, the fog had been dispersed by wind and sun, it was a bright spring day, clear and even hot, though a chilly night followed.

Lieut.-General Snow, commanding the VII. Corps, had decided that, simultaneously with the advance of the main body of his corps downhill towards the Sensée, a detachment should capture the Hindenburg Line on the east bank on a front of some five hundred yards, so as to command the valley and prevent machine guns from firing across the stream on the main attack. His right division, the 33rd, had therefore a dual rôle. The 100th Brigade (Br.-General A. W. F. Baird) was to find the detachment for the lodgement to be effected on the east bank of the Sensée, while the 98th Brigade (Br.-General D. Heriot-Maitland) fought its way towards the stream astride the Hindenburg Line. Each brigade was to have the assistance of a pair of tanks. Obviously, the detachment beyond the Sensée would be unable to hold its ground should the main attack fail ; but the advance down the Hindenburg Line had hitherto been painfully slow and costly, so that it appeared necessary to give it some aid by means of a subsidiary operation of this sort.

The detachment consisted of the 1/Queen's with two companies 16/K.R.R.C. as supports and carriers. It had a night march from Croisilles, which was carried out in silence and good order. Unfortunately, the tanks both broke chains and took no part in the action. The wire was not well cut, but the attackers trampled through it and captured the front trench. In front of the support line

¹ Despite the large number of field guns and howitzers captured or destroyed, the numbers of those weapons had increased from 419 to 548 and from 240 to 256 respectively on the whole battle front. Medium howitzers had increased from 148 to 244, and heavy howitzers from 74 to 97.

the wire was hardly damaged, so that very few men ever reached this trench, and no permanent footing in it was gained. About noon German bombers developed counter-attacks from five separate points. With the aid of the K.R.R.C. companies the Queen's held out till 1.55 p.m., when the Germans rushed the trench-blocks under barrages of light trench-mortar bombs and the British detachment was expelled with heavy loss in prisoners.

The 98th Brigade attacked with three battalions in line. The right was to bomb down the Hindenburg trenches to the Sensée and join hands with the 1/Queen's; the centre and left were to advance across the spur further north, their objective being a line along the south-eastern slope, 1,500 yards from the Sensée.

Extraordinary incidents occurred in this attack. The 1/4th Suffolk in the Hindenburg Line, supported by two companies of the 2/R. Welch Fusiliers (19th Brigade) and aided by a tank which swept along parallel to the front line and knocked out a series of machine guns in concrete emplacements, bombed with amazing speed, taking hundreds of demoralized prisoners. In both trenches the battalion reached the Chérisy—Croisilles road, 2,000 yards from its starting-line and only 300 yards from its objective, but was there held up. In the open the right of the first wave of the 2/Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders and the left of the 1/Middlesex reached their objectives, but the inner flanks and supports were held up by heavy machine-gun fire in front of a little copse on the crest.¹ Between 10 and 11 A.M. the Germans counter-attacked from the north-east, first getting behind the companies which had gone forward and cutting them off, and then bombing their way down a communication trench into the Hindenburg Line. The Suffolk companies in the support line saw what was coming and withdrew to avoid being surrounded, but the Germans occupied the front line in rear of the two remaining companies. The latter held their ground until 2 p.m., when they got out of the trench, and, taking advantage of the folds of the ground, managed to make their way back to their own lines. As to the fate of the Argyll and Middlesex companies there was at first some uncertainty, but it appeared later on that they were holding out, though surrounded by the enemy. It

¹ It appears that two field artillery brigades accidentally fired their barrages in the same zone, thus leaving a gap in which the German infantry held their ground.

is, indeed, probable that he did not locate them for some time.

The 30th Division (Major-General J. S. M. Shea) advanced on a front of 1,500 yards, its objective being the high ground overlooking Chérisy. The attack was carried out by the 90th Brigade (Br.-General J. H. Lloyd) with two battalions, 17/Manchester and 2/R. Scots Fusiliers, in first line. Of the two tanks assisting the brigade, one stuck fast and was promptly put out of action ; the second halted owing to overheating and was destroyed by shell fire. Here, as on most of the front, the enemy's barrage came down almost instantaneously and in very great strength ; indeed, contrary to previous experience, artillery fire was on this occasion even more damaging than that of machine guns. The leading battalions were cut to pieces, after they had reached the German front line and captured four anti-tank guns¹ and a number of prisoners. A flank attack by the 16/Manchester against a quarry which had been chiefly responsible for the failure was cancelled on receipt of a report that the 50th Division had been driven back to its original line.

In the zones of the 33rd and 30th Divisions the main first and second objectives of the VII. Corps (the Blue and Red Lines) had coincided. The 50th Division (Major-General P. S. Wilkinson), whose front stretched from Wancourt Tower to the little lake in the Cojeul valley between Wancourt and Guémappe, had two distinct objectives. The first ran from south of the Vis en Artois—Heninel and Chérisy—Guémappe cross-roads due north to the Cojeul ; the second from 500 yards west of the northern edge of Chérisy to the Cojeul at St. Rohart Factory. The attack was carried out by the 150th Brigade (Br.-General B. G. Price) with two battalions in line. The advance on the second objective was to begin at Z+7 hours, or 11.45 A.M. Two tanks were to support the attack, their objectives being some steep banks just short of the first objective and a tangle of trenches south of St. Rohart Factory on the second.

The 1/4th East Yorkshire and 1/4th Green Howards went forward with great dash and captured the first objective up to time except in the centre, where a party of the enemy in the copse on the Chérisy—Guémappe road held out. By 8 A.M., however, the 1/4th East Yorkshire had

¹ These consisted of three 77-mm. guns and one 150-mm. howitzer, fitted with small wheels. Only one of the guns could be brought in.

taken the copse and dug in on its eastern side.¹ The tanks had given invaluable aid, but one had to turn back at this point owing to engine trouble. Br.-General Price ordered the next step of the advance to be carried out by the 1/5th Green Howards and 1/5th Durham L.I. By 10.30 A.M. four batteries had crossed the Cojeul preparatory to giving close support to this attack. It was, however, postponed by General Allenby, who at 11.22 telegraphed that the advance to the Red Line was not to begin until the Blue Line had been consolidated on the whole front. Upwards of 600 prisoners had been passed back.

Here also there was a strong German counter-attack shortly before 11 A.M. The leading battalions were reinforced by companies from the supports; but, with the right completely open owing to the 30th Division having been checked, and the left exposed to fire from beyond the Cojeul, they were driven back with heavy loss, especially in officers. By 11.30 A.M. all four battalions, a good deal intermingled, were back on the starting-line.

At 2.25 P.M. General Allenby telegraphed that the Blue Line must be taken that day at all costs; the time for the renewed attack was to be decided by Lieut.-General Haldane, whose VI. Corps had taken and lost Guémappe. After consultation with him, 6 P.M. was fixed as the hour. Lieut.-General Snow—who did not know that the companies of the 33rd Division had abandoned the ground gained in the Hindenburg Line but was aware that some parties were holding out on the slopes further north—directed each division to arrange its own barrage, as each had its own problems.

The 33rd Division found it impossible to launch its attack at the prescribed hour, but did so at 6.24 P.M. Despite great gallantry, no progress was made. The 1/5th Scottish Rifles (detached from the 19th Brigade) was driven back by trench mortars and bombs directly it crossed the barriers in the Hindenburg Line, and further north a detachment consisting of two companies of each of the 2/R. Welch Fusiliers, 2/Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders and 1/Middlesex, had even less chance of advancing across the open in broad daylight. The British barrage passed right over the advanced companies of the 2/Argyll and 1/Middlesex, but apparently inflicted little loss. So

¹ Captain D. P. Hirsch, 4/Green Howards, killed in this action, was awarded the V.C. posthumously for conspicuous bravery and devotion to duty in the attack.

far from being beaten in the Hindenburg Line, the Germans at 7.45 p.m. made a fierce attack on the barrier in the support trench, but were driven off by the fine resistance of a party of the 2/R. Welch Fusiliers.

On the front of the 30th Division the renewed attack was carried out by the 18/Manchester of the 90th Brigade and the 19/Manchester of the 21st, under the orders of Br.-General G. D. Goodman, commanding the 21st Brigade. The company commanders had hardly time to reach their companies—one of them was killed on the way, and his company did not move. On the right the 19/Manchester got a footing in the enemy's front line and held on to it ; on the left the 18/Manchester made some ground but was driven back with heavy loss, all its officers who took part in the attack becoming casualties. The occupation of the old German practice trenches half-way between the Cojeul and the Sensée by fragments of companies represented all that the 30th Division had to show for the day's fighting.

Major-General Wilkinson, commanding the 50th Division, placed two battalions of the 151st Brigade at the disposal of the 150th. Br.-General Price put them in first line, 1/5th Border Regiment on the right and 1/9th Durham L.I. on the left, supported by the 1/5th Green Howards and 1/5th Durham L.I., the only two of his own battalions which could muster more than small parties of weary men. In order to simplify the task of the artillery it was directed to repeat the barrage of the morning's operation. This time the steadiness and determination of the advance proved too much for the enemy. He was wearied out and beaten after a long "slogging match". Parties of his infantry surrendered freely, while others retreated under fire. On the left the whole objective was captured ; on the right the flank had to be refused because of the failure of the 30th Division, but the copse which had given so much trouble in the morning was retaken and the front then curved back to 400 yards east of Wancourt Tower. There was acute anxiety in the 30th Division that night, when it was reported that parties of men were falling back through the guns which had been brought across the Cojeul, and that the enemy was close on their heels. The breech-blocks were removed ; but in fact the enemy never reached the guns, and all was quiet soon after midnight.

Next morning, the 24th, some of the fruits of this hard fighting were gathered. At daylight the 33rd Division discovered that the enemy had gone back down the hill

approximately to the line of the Chérisy—Croisilles road. A general advance followed. In the Hindenburg Line the 33rd Division pushed on to where the Fontaine—St. Martin road crossed the support trench. Further north it reached the position so gallantly maintained by the isolated companies of the Argyll and Middlesex, whose tenacity had undoubtedly contributed to the success.¹ The 30th Division likewise occupied the Blue Line and the 50th swung up its right to bring it on to the portion not reached the previous day. That night the enemy temporarily drove its troops out of the copse, but was expelled once again, and a line was finally established 500 yards to the east of it.

The total advance was one of 1,500 yards on the fronts of the 33rd and 30th Divisions and a mile in the centre of the 50th. The 33rd had captured 742 prisoners, the 30th, 160, and the 50th, approximately, 900, with three Russian guns, apparently intended for defence against tanks.

THE ATTACK OF THE VI. CORPS

The problem before Lieut.-General Haldane's VI. Corps was complicated by the irregularity of its front. From the lake between Wancourt and Guémappe the line ran almost due north, then curved north-eastward, formed an abrupt salient round the village of Monchy le Preux, and followed the Monchy—Fampoux road to the Scarpe. The salient was not quite so sharp as this would imply, because Lone Copse valley, north-west of Monchy, was not occupied by the enemy and could be used by the left wing to form up for the attack. It was, however, necessary to "step," or echelon back, the creeping barrage covering the advance just south of Monchy. The only alternative would have been to push up the flanks to the level of the Monchy defences by a preliminary advance. That seemed an impossible solution, because of the flanking fire which would have been directed from Hill 100, or "Infantry Hill", as it was now commonly called, if this height were not itself simultaneously attacked. The hill would, of course, have been kept under continuous artillery fire, but experience had proved that it was very difficult indeed

¹ Captain A. Henderson, though wounded as he went forward, led his company of the Argyll to the objective, consolidated it when reached, and by his courage and coolness maintained the spirit of his men in their isolation. Killed at the conclusion of the action, he received the posthumous award of the V.C.

to neutralize every machine gun by such means. To reach the Blue Line, or first objective—a line running approximately north and south across the centre of Hill 100—the right of the corps had to advance 2,500 yards, whereas opposite Monchy the distance was only 900 yards. The second objective included St. Rohart Factory, the Bois du Sart, and the village of Pelves.

The 15th Division (Major-General F. W. N. McCracken), with right on the Cojeul and left at La Bergère, was attacking with two brigades, the 44th and 45th, in line. The 45th was to advance with its right battalion level with the 44th but its left battalion echeloned forward to connect with the troops of the 29th Division.

The 44th Brigade (Br.-General F. J. Marshall) had been directed by Major-General McCracken to employ one battalion solely in the capture of Guémappe. This task was allotted to the 8/Seaforth Highlanders. The 7/Cameron Highlanders and the 9/Black Watch, in support, were to pass north of the village after it had been captured, extend to the Cojeul, and then attack the Blue Line.

The 8/Seaforth was held up 200 yards short of Guémappe, which proved itself as hard a nut to crack now as ever, and the 7/Cameron, coming up on the left, could not cross a trench (Bullet Trench) covering the village from the north-west. The 9/Black Watch was now ordered up. An old-fashioned struggle for superiority of fire developed, while the Seaforths crept forward from trench to trench. After two hours' pressure the enemy gave way and evacuated the village. A line of posts was hastily formed east and north of it by parties from all three battalions. Meanwhile the 45th Brigade (Br.-General W. H. L. Allgood) had likewise been checked at the start, but the 11/Argyll, bringing up a Stokes mortar and making good use of grenades, gradually drove the Germans out of Bullet Trench. The left of the 13/Royal Scots, advancing with the 29th Division, had reached the Blue Line, but the right was held up on the Monchy—Guémappe road.

As the 50th Division had made good progress south of the Cojeul and the right of the 29th Division was only just short of the Blue Line, Major-General McCracken determined to renew the attack, under a fresh barrage, at noon. Before it could take place the counter-attack already mentioned drove back the 50th Division and exposed the right of the 15th to a storm of machine-gun fire from south of the Cojeul. The Seaforths fell back from Guémappe

just before 11 A.M. The counter-attack extended north of the Cojeul also, but the posts north of Guémappe held their ground stoutly. One post even maintained its position east of the village, and it was in large measure due to this little party that the enemy never re-entered Guémappe, which was for some hours unoccupied by either side.

The 29th Division (Major-General Sir B. de Lisle) had the 88th Brigade on the right and the 87th on the left. The 88th (Lieut.-Colonel A. T. Beckwith¹) employed one battalion, the 4/Worcestershire, in first line; the 87th (Br.-General C. H. T. Lucas) had two, the 1/K.O.S.B. and 2/S. Wales Borderers.

As the barrage began to move forward, the enemy bombarded Monchy very heavily. The attack was successful except that on the left the advance fell slightly short of the first objective; but even here it reached the arrow-headed copse east of Monchy Park, and the morning counter-attack was repulsed. Both flanks were, however, exposed, and on the right the 2/Hampshire, in support to the 4/Worcestershire, had to round up in Pick Trench, west of the Monchy—Vis en Artois road, a party of over fifty Germans who would have been in a position to fire into the backs of the troops on the Blue Line.

It had been arranged that the 12th and 29th Division artillery, in support of the 29th Division, should advance to the valley west of Monchy on the firing of a rocket signal that the Wancourt Tower ridge had been completely cleared and that the enemy could no longer look down into the valley. The signal was duly fired, and the artillery moved forward at the trot or gallop—a splendid and inspiring sight which most of the onlookers now saw for the first time. The arrival of the batteries in the valley, however, almost coincided with the successful counter-attack against the VII. Corps front, with the result that the Germans placed an accurate heavy-artillery barrage on the new positions. These batteries also appeared to be in considerable danger owing to the temporary hold-up of the 15th Division's left flank north of Guémappe. The behaviour of the detachments was magnificent. Occasionally, owing to the severity of the fire, one was temporarily withdrawn, but it went forward to man the guns again at the first opportunity. The batteries stood their ground and obtained some remarkable targets.

¹ The brigade commander, Br.-General D. E. Cayley, had been gassed and sent to hospital for a few days.

About noon the enemy began an artillery preparation which clearly boded a deliberate counter-attack. This was launched at 4 P.M., in great strength. At one point only did it have any success, the right of the 4/Worcestershire, intermingled with men of the 2/Hampshire, being driven back to Shrapnel Trench, on the line of Monchy Windmill, and in some cases even further.

The fact that the right of the 29th Division had been forced back in confusion obviously affected the renewed attack which the 15th was to make at 6 P.M. in accordance with the orders of General Allenby. Major-General McCracken therefore decided that the barrage should halt for an hour on a line running due south from Monchy Windmill to the Cojeul. The infantry of the 46th Brigade (Br.-General E. A. Fagan) was meanwhile to consolidate this line in case they were counter-attacked after reaching the final objective. The order did not reach the 46th Brigade till 5.30 P.M. and it was impossible to warn one battalion, the 10th/11th Highland L.I. This battalion went straight through the British barrage, from which it suffered considerable loss, to the Blue Line north of the Cambrai road. Here it was obliged to refuse its right flank because of its inability to take the roadside buildings known as Cavalry Farm. The 10/Scottish Rifles, on the right, carried out the programme correctly and dug in on the right of the Highland L.I. Unfortunately, the 29th Division could take no part in this movement because of the confusion following the afternoon counter-attack. The 10th/11th Highland L.I., unable to maintain itself in its exposed position with the enemy working round its flank, fell back to a trench running north from the neighbourhood of Guémappe Cemetery, and the Scottish Rifles conformed to this movement.

The left division of the VI. Corps, the 17th (Major-General P. R. Robertson), made very little progress. The 7/Border Regiment and the 8/South Staffordshire of the 51st Brigade (Br.-General G. F. Trotter) advancing from Lone Copse were repulsed with heavy loss. The assault was renewed, first by the leading battalions, then by the 10/Sherwood Foresters and 7/Lincolnshire; but the only success was a somewhat precarious footing in Bayonet Trench, 300 yards from the starting-line.¹ In the second

¹ Bayonet Trench, dug by the enemy after the opening of the battle, ran north to the Scarpe from the maze of trenches north-west of Monchy shown on Map 5.

attack at 6 P.M. the division had no better fortune. The 10/West Yorkshire and 6/Dorsetshire of the 50th Brigade (Br.-General C. Yatman) were now, owing to the loss of Rœux by the XVII. Corps, exposed to enfilade fire from north of the Scarpe in addition to the frontal fire which had stopped their predecessors, and gained no ground whatever.

At 8.35 P.M. General Allenby issued orders for all corps to consolidate the Blue Line during the night and prepare to advance to the Red Line at 4 P.M. on the 24th. Actually, when these orders were telegraphed the first objective had been reached nowhere except in the centre of the 29th Division. They were therefore modified, the objective being limited for the time being to the Blue Line, except that the 29th Division was to secure the summit of Hill 100. By the afternoon, as we have seen, the Blue Line had been reached on the VII. Corps front. On that of the VI. Corps another effort had to be made.

The 15th Division renewed the attack with the 46th Brigade, 10/Scottish Rifles on the right and 12/Highland L.I. on the left. Again intense fire from Cavalry Farm prevented its capture, but except that the line curved back west of the ruins, the Blue Line was virtually attained. One more attempt on the farm was made during the night of the 26th by the 9/Black Watch and 7/Cameron Highlanders of the 44th Brigade, after a heavy artillery bombardment. This time the buildings were rushed, but could not be held owing to the intense fire directed upon them. A post was established to the east, and though it was driven in next morning the farm was denied to the enemy.

As Major-General McCracken wrote afterwards, the struggle had been a soldier's battle. Between set attacks the troops had never ceased their independent efforts to win ground with the aid of rifle, Lewis gun, and grenade ; and it was by wearing down the enemy that they had achieved what they had.

On the right of the 29th Division the 86th Brigade (Br.-General W. de L. Williams) reached its objective, but the 1/R. Dublin Fusiliers were driven back to Shrapnel Trench. The division was relieved that night by the 3rd Division. The incoming troops could not take over the scattered shell-hole posts on the right, so first of all established themselves in Shrapnel Trench and later pushed forward without opposition to within two hundred yards

of the Blue Line. Save that both flanks were slightly refused, this objective had thus almost been gained on the centre divisional front.

The 17th Division struggled on during the 24th and 25th, gaining a few yards of trench north of Monchy, but it would be profitless to describe these operations in detail. It was relieved by the 12th Division on the night of the 25th.

THE ATTACK OF THE XVII. AND XIII. CORPS

North of the Scarpe the attack was carried out by the XVII. Corps with the 51st and 37th Divisions, and the XIII. Corps with the 63rd. Lieut.-General Fergusson, commanding the XVII. Corps, had some doubt whether a division so highly tried as the 51st was capable of reaching the fortified ridge on which stood Delbar and Hausa Woods, at the extreme range of its 18-pdr. batteries.¹ He requested that Rœux and the Chemical Works should be the final objective here, but this plea was refused. He then established two intermediate objectives. The first objective of the corps was now Mount Pleasant Wood, a newly-dug trench running north from it to the Oppy line half a mile south of Gavrelle, and the Oppy line itself, which was also the first objective of the 63rd Division. The second was the Army Blue Line, Rœux, the Chemical Works, and the Rœux—Gavrelle road, while the 63rd Division was to reach the main street of Gavrelle, one-third of the way through the village. The third curved up from the Chemical Works to the Plouvain—Gavrelle road and followed it to the eastern outskirts of Gavrelle, the objective of the 63rd Division. The fourth was a trench covering Delbar and Hausa Woods and taking in Plouvain Station.

The 51st Division (Major-General G. M. Harper) had a peculiarly difficult task owing to the conglomeration of buildings in its path—the straggling village of Rœux, the château, the Chemical Works, the station, and another group north of the railway—which had already given grim proof of their capacity for resistance. Having now established itself on the road running from the railway

¹ This ridge is part of the spur known as Greenland Hill. The British maps, founded on the French, were incorrect at this point. Actually the summit, surmounted by a windmill, is just south of the railway instead of 700 yards north of it. A German map captured about this time disclosed the error.

along the bank of the Scarpe,¹ the division was able to advance more nearly parallel to its objectives than had been the case with its predecessors, but this extension of the front prevented any 18-pdrs. being used for the standing barrage beyond the "creeper".

The 154th Brigade (Br.-General J. G. H. Hamilton) attacking between the Scarpe and the railway, was to capture the first objective at Z+19 minutes. For the further movement through Rœux and the woodlands the barrage was to be slowed down to the rate of 100 yards in six minutes, so as to give the troops a chance of fighting their way through these obstacles without losing it.

The 1/7th Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders and 1/4th Gordon Highlanders were held up close to their starting-line by machine-gun fire both frontally from Rœux and in enfilade from the south bank of the Scarpe, but did not abandon the struggle and gradually worked their way forward. The Argyll then obtained the assistance of a tank (C.7: 2nd Lieutenant L. Victor Smith), the exploits of which were hardly surpassed during the whole course of the battle. Twenty minutes late already and held up for some minutes longer at the railway arch on the Fampoux—Rœux road by wounded lying on the ground at an aid post established under its shelter, 2nd Lieutenant Smith caught up the infantry and carried them on. Together they went forward to Rœux, where the tank repeatedly put 6-pdr. shells through the windows of houses occupied by the enemy, firing in all 200 rounds. With its aid, the Argyll, though all their officers were casualties, cleared the village. The end of the tank's activities came when it was bogged on its way back to deal with a machine gun still holding out in Mount Pleasant Wood. Parties of the Gordons, again powerfully supported by a tank,² entered the Chemical Works, but were isolated and unable to hold their ground. The companies of the 1/4th Seaforth Highlanders renewed the attack at 11.5 A.M. The right was held up south of the château, but the left recaptured the Chemical Works. On their right the Argyll were forced out of Rœux, but, supported by companies of the 1/9th Royal Scots, clung

¹ See p. 381.

² This tank had first turned back because members of its crew, including its commander, had been wounded by armour-piercing bullets. It then set out again under the command of Sergeant Noel, whose work was all the more praiseworthy because he was short-handed.

to its western outskirts. The line was thus everywhere beyond the first objective but, except at the Chemical Works, had nowhere reached the second.

The 153rd Brigade (Br.-General D. Campbell) attacked with the 1/7th Black Watch on the right and the 1/7th Gordon Highlanders on the left. Only on the left was the first objective reached behind the barrage, but troops were seen going on across the Gavrelle road, and it was only when the reserve battalions, the 1/6th Gordon Highlanders (detached from the 152nd Brigade) and 1/6th Black Watch, moved up preparatory to the attack on the final objective that the true situation was discovered. Another tank of C Battalion gave the infantry useful aid, though it was riddled by armour-piercing bullets just north of the railway. After desperate fighting the whole of the first objective was captured, and then the station buildings. Meanwhile two companies of the 1/7th Gordon Highlanders had gone forward with great gallantry to Greenland Hill, only to be forced back to the Rœux—Gavrelle road. The situation was extraordinarily confused and it was for a long time uncertain who held the Chemical Works and station; but when the 1/6th Seaforth Highlanders (detached from the 152nd Brigade) moved forward about midnight it found both held by the enemy.¹

As his own troops had suffered severely, Major-General Harper brought up two battalions of the 34th Division, which had been placed at his disposal, and at night relieved the 153rd Brigade by the 103rd of that division. It was not until the early morning of the 24th April that the precise front could be ascertained. It ran from the original right flank north of the Scarpe to the edge of the wood west of Rœux, due north—that is, east of Mount Pleasant Wood—to the railway, took in the buildings north of the station, and then followed the Rœux—Gavrelle road, the depth of the advance here being 1,000 yards. Five officers and 349 other ranks of the enemy had been captured by the 51st Division.

The 37th Division (Major-General H. B. Williams) had been substituted at the last moment for the 4th, and had thus had little time for reconnaissance of ground entirely unknown to it. The 63rd Brigade formed up in the trenches of the Oppy line, whereas the 11th Brigade had to capture the sector of this line on its front as the

¹ From the reports of returned officer prisoners of war it is clear that he recaptured both just after sunset.

first objective. On the right of the 63rd Brigade (Br.-General E. L. Challenor) the 4/Middlesex reached the second objective, the Roeux—Gavrelle road, but was able to progress only two hundred yards beyond it. The 10/York & Lancaster lost the barrage, and failed to reach the first objective; but the 8/Lincolnshire, moving up quickly from support, carried forward the stationary line and turned the enemy out of his trench west of the road by enfilade fire—a good piece of tactics not as common as it ought to have been.¹

The 6/Bedfordshire of the 112th Brigade, which was placed at Br.-General Challoner's disposal at 9.10 A.M., carried the line forward level with that of the Middlesex, previously in the air on both flanks.

The 111th Brigade (Br.-General C. W. Compton) performed one of the finest feats of the day. The 10th and 13th Royal Fusiliers, on the right and in the centre, both captured their first and second objectives and then established themselves some two hundred yards beyond the Roeux—Gavrelle road, half-way to the third, but were unable to make any further progress. The 13/K.R.R.C. on the left fought its way up to the final objective, the Plouvain—Gavrelle road. On hearing what had happened, Br.-General Compton sent the 13/Rifle Brigade up to form a flank connecting the right of the 13/K.R.R.C. with the left of the 13/Royal Fusiliers on the Roeux—Gavrelle road.

At 6.30 P.M. the 112th Brigade (Br.-General R. C. M. Maclachlan) attempted to pass through the front of the 63rd and to capture that part of the final objective still untaken. Major-General Williams, who had an excellent view of the battle-field—the ground from Greenland Hill to Oppy lay very favourably for the British—ordered this attack because it appeared to him that the Germans had fallen back; he was, indeed, expecting that a general advance would become possible. Actually, there can have been little opposition now on his immediate front short of the Rouvroy—Fresnes line, from which bodies of the

¹ Lieut-Colonel D. W. C. Davies-Evans, commanding the Lincolnshire, records that, having gone forward with a sergeant and two men to get in touch with the 8/Somerset L.I., in support to the 4/Middlesex, he found himself overlooking the German trench from higher ground and from a flank. He and his men opened fire, the commanding officer using a German rifle, and made such good practice that finally the Germans began to throw off their equipment and make signs of surrender. Eighty-two gave themselves up to a company of the Somerset, which dashed forward on observing what was happening.

enemy had all day been attempting to reinforce, only to be raked by the artillery supporting the 37th and 51st Divisions. Indeed, with perfect visibility, the field artillery was presented with a series of targets such as the most sanguine battery commander could not have hoped for. Those Germans who made their way through this fire ran into that of machine guns of the 37th Division in advanced positions. Yet while the enemy held the Chemical Works no further advance by the British was, in fact, possible; machine-gun fire from this quarter prevented the 112th from gaining any ground beyond the front of the 63rd Brigade. What had been accomplished was, however, considerable in fighting of such a character, the advance being one of 1,500 yards on the right and 2,000 yards on the left.

The capture of Gavrelle was allotted to the 63rd Division of the XIII. Corps (Lieut.-General Sir W. N. Congreve). The artillery was strong for so narrow a frontage. The corps had at its disposal five heavy artillery groups,¹ the 63rd Division artillery reinforced by a brigade of the 31st Division and three Army field brigades, and the 2nd Division artillery—covering its own division on the left of the corps front but also able to support the 63rd—likewise reinforced by a brigade of the 31st Division and three Army field brigades.

It will be recalled that the First Army's attack had been limited to the capture of Gavrelle because the wire on the Oppy line further north was insufficiently cut. On the night before the battle it was found that even opposite Gavrelle the wire-cutting was not satisfactory. This was reported by the 189th Brigade to Major-General C. E. Lawrie, the divisional commander, just before midnight, with a request that the operation should be postponed. Major-General Lawrie could not possibly assent, all the less because an air patrol had reported some gaps. The troops, he said, must make their way through. Br.-General L. F. Philips, though with little time at his disposal, ordered his right battalion, the Drake, which had sent the message, to assault only the left half of its objective in the Oppy line, since it was there that the gaps had been reported, and to keep the rest of the trench under Stokes mortar fire while bombers worked down it. This plan was

¹ XVIII., XXIX., XLIX., LXXX. and LXXXIII. Heavy Artillery Groups, comprising four 60-pdr., thirteen 6-inch howitzer, five 8-inch howitzer, and five 9.2-inch howitzer batteries.

successful. The Drake companies found the gaps and made their way through them, and the Nelson Battalion on the left was not checked.

On the front of the 190th Brigade (Br.-General A. W. E. Finch) the 4/Bedfordshire also captured the first objective, but the 7/Royal Fusiliers, held up by uncut wire and fire from the open left flank, made only a small lodgement in it. The three successful battalions then went on and took the second objective, the main street of the village. If any battalion was to fail, it was particularly unfortunate that it should be the left, which had the task of throwing back a flank from the second objective to the old German front line. Moreover, after capturing the second objective, the 4/Bedfordshire was to have advanced diagonally to the line of the Arras—Douai railway, in order to form the final flank of the attack, and its prospects of doing so were now seriously prejudiced. It was, in fact, held up, and the left was thus dangerously exposed.

The Hood Battalion, which was to have waited till the leading battalions of the 189th Brigade gained their first objective, had been pushed forward on their heels by Commander A. M. Asquith, in order to avoid the prompt and heavy German barrage. During the pause on the second objective the streets became crowded with men of the Hood and Nelson, intermingled with part of the Bedfordshire, and it required hard work on the part of the senior officers to effect some reorganization and induce the troops to continue their advance close to the barrage when it moved on at 6.1 A.M. The eastern outskirts of the village were reached, but, as at Fampoux on the 9th April, it was proved that it is sometimes easier to capture a village than to debouch beyond it. The advance was now held up by very heavy machine-gun fire, and south of the village the Drake Battalion could not progress more than fifty yards beyond the Plouvain road. When orders were received to make an attempt to reach the final objective, 300 yards east of the village, the commanders on the spot decided that in their exposed position such an action would be altogether foolhardy. Actually, if they could have seized the windmill on the high ground to the north-east they would have greatly improved their position. It is now known that the enemy regarded this point as of more importance than even the village itself.

It was, however, perhaps as well that the brigade confined its activities to defence of the already considerable

gains ; for several strong counter-attacks had to be met and repulsed, and it was not till evening that the 1/H.A.C. of the 190th Brigade succeeded in bombing its way up the Oppy line almost to the railway, thus affording a certain amount of security to the left flank.

The night was quiet, but early on the morning of the 24th further counter-attacks were broken up before they had really developed. About noon began a terrific bombardment of Gavrelle, and presently the Germans were seen massed at Mauville Farm, north of Fresnes les Montauban. At 3.30 P.M. some three battalions advanced in ten waves. The enemy, with the westering sun in his eyes, offered a wonderful target to the artillery supporting the 63rd and 37th Divisions. The leading lines were swept away, but their successors came on with undiminished resolution, to be finally broken up by the machine guns and Lewis guns of the defence, after elements had actually reached the houses of Gavrelle.

Full justice has not been done to the achievement of the 63rd Division, because the details of the street fighting, in which it showed skill and determination, are too intricate for description. The division had taken 479 prisoners and in defeating the counter-attacks had obviously inflicted heavy loss upon the enemy.

So ended an exceptionally hard-fought battle. The volume of artillery fire had been enormous. The artillery of the 63rd Division expended 78,000 rounds in 48 hours, an average of 13,000 rounds per brigade, and this was far exceeded by the XL Brigade R.F.A. (3rd Division, attached 15th), which by noon on the 24th had shot off 15,000 rounds. It is not surprising that recoil springs began to fail.

The casualties were lower than might be expected, probably not much over 8,000.¹ The number of prisoners captured by the Third Army was 2,264.

Some of the ground gained, especially the ridge across which ran the road from Rœux to Gavrelle and that between the Sensée and the Cojeul, had considerable

¹ The casualties of the Third Army for the week 18th to 25th April were reported to be 603 officers and 5,498 other ranks. In the next week's report 2,015 casualties not previously reported and obviously belonging to the period 18th to 25th, were added, bringing the total up to over 8,000. To this figure has to be added the losses of the 63rd Division, which did not form part of the Third Army. On the other hand, there must be deducted those for the four days prior to the 23rd, on some of which casualties were fairly heavy at certain points.

tactical value. Both the Commander-in-Chief and the Army commander had the impression that resistance was weaker than during the period from the 11th to the 14th April and that subsequent progress would be easier. Detailed examination of the fighting does not in the least confirm this view. It seems certain, however, that had the bulk of the British divisions been fresher more would have been accomplished. It was not only the strain and shock of battle which had worn out the troops; preparatory work, carried out for the most part by night, in foul weather, upon churned-up ground, and often under heavy fire, had also contributed to their fatigue. The infantry always advanced with splendid determination, but, subjected to counter-attacks, whereas some divisions held their ground stoutly, weariness seems to have lessened the sticking-power of others. There is no more candid critic of infantry than the artilleryman of another division engaged in supporting it. One field artillery brigade attached to a division other than its own thus embodied the reports of its forward observing officer on the 24th :

"The infantry were again fairly successful at the beginning, but they . . . refuse to remain in the open under shell fire. This was very apparent in the attack to-day; for as soon as the enemy started to barrage them and made a counter-attack they retired hastily."

The criticism could only apply to one or two incidents; but it is worth while noting as an indication of how much was being asked of tired troops, and perhaps also of the prevailing lack of confidence in the rifle as a weapon of defence.

The calls upon the troops were all the higher because the German defence was no longer a makeshift, a new system applied to fortifications developed when an old one was in force. In the *Sixth Army* a very remarkable soldier, Colonel von Lossberg, had been brought in as Chief of the Staff after the *débâcle* of the 9th April. Under his inspiration commanders were carrying a step further the abandonment of the system of defence in fortified localities. The British were now coming up against less formidable entrenchments, certainly, but also against a remarkable development in the German defensive strategy and tactics.

Colonel von Lossberg had been the foremost critic of O.H.L.'s new text-book.¹ Not only was he opposed to the

¹ G.O.A., xi., p. 17.

system of defence in fortified localities; he also disliked the "elastic" element, which permitted retirement on the part of the front-line garrisons, fearing that it would be impossible to induce troops who had fallen back under pressure to counter-attack when required. He and Ludendorff, however, had in common a firm belief in a deep, zonal system of defence, based upon the counter-attack. And, on the principle of elasticity, where their views conflicted, a compromise was gradually reached whereby elasticity was permitted on suitable ground, but not otherwise.

We shall see that it was practised, with unhappy results for the British, against the 34th Division south of Rœux and the 2nd Division at Oppy on the 28th April.

Colonel von Lossberg proceeded to treat the Drocourt—Quéant or Wotan Line in the same manner as the Hindenburg Line had been treated on the front of the *First Army*, south of Quéant.¹ That is to say, he built a defensive organization, the Rouvroy—Fresnes—Boiry line, in front of it, to cover the artillery positions. This was to be the main line of defence. In front of it was a zone of from 1,500 to 2,000 yards in depth, corresponding to the Hindenburg outpost zone; while between the Fresnes and the Wotan lines was a second, deeper zone, corresponding to the Hindenburg battle zone. With the approbation of Crown Prince Rupprecht he decided, however, that until the British pressure became more severe, the outpost zone should be held as a battle zone. Behind it, that is, behind the Fresnes line, were to be the assembly areas of the counter-attack divisions, one in support of each pair of first-line divisions. At the same time he made a beginning with the construction of a Wotan II Line, covering Douai and joining the original Hindenburg position near Sains les Marquion. He thus at a stroke converted the Wotan Line into a Wotan position, on the model of the Hindenburg position already described.

South of the Scarpe the front line was now sited two to four hundred yards behind some sort of crest, which made it difficult to range upon. Immediately north of the river, too, the ground was suitable to counter-attack, cover for which was provided by undulations and numerous copses. On the flanks, however, these conditions were not fulfilled. The long slope down from the Wancourt Tower ridge to the Sensée valley was bare and exposed, and between

¹ See p. 91.

Fresnes and Neuville the British had complete command of all the approaches. In these circumstances the German command accepted the situation between the Hindenburg Line and the Cojeul, left the division in that sector to its own resources, and when it had been fought to a standstill simply withdrew it through the counter-attack division in Chérisy-Riegel. Elsewhere it employed the counter-attack divisions with considerable success, though much of the ground re-won by counter-attacks was not held. In the neighbourhood of the Douai road, however, the danger of the British capturing the spurs which commanded the Drocourt—Quéant Line was considered so great that costly and fruitless counter-attacks were launched against Gavrelle, whereas it would probably have sufficed to occupy the Fresnes-Riegel in strength. The danger always exists that, a promising system having been evolved, it will be ridden to death.

Perhaps, too, such a danger was especially pressing in the German Army, with its rigid discipline and habits of implicit obedience. Subordinate commanders were under the system given remarkable freedom of action — but always within the system. They showed equally remarkable initiative—but again always within the system. They had been taught that the former front line was the objective of the counter-attack, so they launched their counter-attacks, great and small, to recapture it. Taking the broad view, it probably paid them on the whole battle-front, even though it proved very costly. Above all, it encouraged any troops still holding out forward, who could always rely on a counter-attack to rescue them. Rœux was recovered in this fashion, by a battalion commander who had fallen back, but who when he saw a white rocket go up from the village as a signal that some of his men were fighting it out, led forward again the handful of troops at his disposal and recaptured it.

The Germans actually employed in defence nine divisions, or parts of them, and one independent regiment against the nine British divisions—not counting the 34th—which took part in the attack. The attack had thus no odds in its favour except in artillery, whereas the defence is usually credited with having an advantage of two and a half or three to one. The more one studies the battle the more remarkable, despite occasional weaknesses, does the British achievement appear. It was by wearing down the first-line divisions, and even in some cases the

reserves brought forward for the purpose of launching counter-attacks, that the measure of success attained was made possible. "At the end of a long day the enemy "is done", wrote Major-General McCracken, whose 15th Division had reinforced its initial dash with the dourest resolution, and may be said to share with the 50th Division the supreme honours of the contest. It was not unfitting that so fierce and stubborn a battle should be fought on St. George's Day—though the 15th Division cannot be included among those who acknowledged St. George as patron saint.

THE ATTACK ON LA COULOTTE

North of Gavrelle the First Army was confronted by the original German third line, already greatly strengthened, which, owing chiefly to unfavourable weather conditions, the artillery had been unable satisfactorily to prepare for assault. For this reason the major operation originally projected against the Oppy—Méricourt line had been limited, as stated earlier in this chapter, to a local action further north, between the Vimy—Lens railway and Hill 65, where the third line had not yet been reached. This action was to be carried out by the inner flanks of the Canadian and I. Corps, south and north respectively of the Souchez river. The objective was the existing German front line, in other words, that part of the Vimy-Riegel from the Vimy—Lens railway to Hill 65, where it joined the Avion-Riegel.

The Canadian Corps delivered its attack with the 15th and 95th Brigades of the 5th Division (Major-General R. B. Stephens) at 4.45 A.M. Its execution had been conditional on the wire in front of the Vimy-Riegel being sufficiently cut, and a favourable report to that effect made by the 16th Squadron R.F.C. on the previous evening had been confirmed by infantry patrols after dark. A later report from an officer received by Br.-General M. N. Turner, commanding the 15th Brigade, was less favourable, but as it was not received till about midnight there could then be no question of cancelling the attack. A sufficient number of gaps had not, in fact, been cut, and machine-gun nests in the buildings behind the position were intact. These guns opened fire on the leading wave of the four attacking battalions, 1/Northumberland Fusiliers, 1/Bedfordshire, 1/Devonshire, and 1/Duke of Cornwall's L.I.,

and caused serious loss. When the barrage moved on beyond the position, it was only scattered parties that were able to fight their way in through gaps in the wire, and these not without some delay. At other points the wire saved the Germans, who actually held up their hands when they saw the British infantry approaching, and then, finding that their assailants could not reach them, picked up their weapons and defended themselves. Against those points where the attack had broken into the Vimy-Riegel, the enemy soon initiated bombing attacks. A very gallant resistance was put up by isolated British detachments, but as no reinforcements could cross the exposed ground to support them, the survivors were obliged to fall back to their original position during the afternoon. The left battalion, however, continued to hold the railway loop, south of the Souchez river, which it had occupied.¹

The attack of the I. Corps north of the river against Fosse 3/bis de Liévin and Hill 65 was delivered by the 139th Brigade (Br.-General C. T. Shipley²) of the 46th Division, with the 6th and 8th Sherwood Foresters. The enemy had already given ground here, and though the commander of the 46th Division, Major-General Thwaites, considered that the retirement was over, at least for the time being, the corps commander, Lieut.-General A. E. A. Holland, had formed the opinion that the position was lightly held and, indeed, that the abandonment of Lens might be imminent. Consequently, the attack was not made in sufficient strength, only one company from each battalion carrying out the actual assault. On reaching the fosse, the leading company of the 6/Sherwood Foresters came under a heavy fire from machine guns concealed in the buildings and was then counter-attacked by strong bombing parties, which compelled the evacuation of the ground gained. Only one isolated house and a row of cottages in No Man's Land were retained. Similarly, the assault company of the 8/Sherwood Foresters, after capturing the western edge of Hill 65, was counter-attacked by large numbers of Germans emerging from the terraces of miners' cottages and from dug-outs on the hill, and only a small proportion of the company was able to extricate itself and get back.

¹ Neither this small advance nor the maze of industrial railway track round Lens is shown on Map 8. The railway can be identified on Map 3, west of the "Central Electricity Station".

² Br.-General Shipley had commanded the brigade since 9th September 1911, an extraordinary record.

As the attack of the 5th Division south of the river had not progressed, it was considered that a renewed effort by the 139th Brigade to take the fosse and Hill 65 would not materially affect the situation, and further operations were cancelled.¹

NOTE

THE GERMANS IN THE SECOND BATTLE OF THE SCARPE

The German divisions facing the British attack on the 23rd April had not changed since the reliefs described in the note to Chapter X. The only one which had been there at the opening of the battle was the 220th, and it was not engaged till the British approached the Sensée brook. There had been slight adjustments, the 26th Division being now south of the Scarpe instead of astride it.

The 220th Division lay astride the Sensée. Next, from about the Héninel—Croisilles road, came the 35th, with right on the Cojeul. From the Cojeul to the northern edge of the Bois du Sart was the 3rd Bavarian; thence to the Scarpe, the 26th. From the Scarpe (which formed the boundary between the two corps, *Group Arras* and *Group Vimy*) to the southern outskirts of Gavrelle, was the 18th, and from Gavrelle to Oppy the 17th. In immediate reserve there were from south to north the 199th, 221st, 185th, and 208th. In addition the 9th Grenadier Regiment of the 3rd Guard Division, which division was in line near Bullecourt, had been detached and was held in reserve to *Group Arras*.

On the extreme British right the 220th Division ejected the 1/Queen's from its lodgement in the Hindenburg Line, but met with tough resistance. The regiments of the 35th Division were, approximately, each facing a British division, the 88rd, 30th, and 50th. The 176th Regiment was driven out of the Hindenburg Line, but retook it by the dramatic counter-attack described in the text. The 61st Regiment repulsed the frontal attack of the 30th Division. The front battalion of the 141st Regiment was overrun by the 50th Division, but its support battalion restored the situation. It is claimed that at 1 p.m. one man actually entered Wancourt Tower and cut the telephone line there. The regiment was finally overwhelmed by the evening attack of the 50th Division. As stated in the text, the 35th Division was not reinforced, but was withdrawn at night through the 199th, which was placed in the Chérisy-Riegel.

¹ The failure of these attacks north and south of the Souchez river was due primarily to the fact that they came up against the new system of defence, to meet which no provision had been made. Four German regiments were involved: the 35th, on Hill 65, and 118th of the 56th Division, and the 34th Reserve and 266th Reserve, with its left on the Lens—Vimy railway, of the 80th Reserve Division. They repulsed the attacks with their own resources, so that the counter-attack division, 1st Guard Reserve, behind this sector of the *Group Souchez* was available to be sent that same evening southwards to assist the *Group Vimy* in its effort to recapture the lost ground about Gavrelle.

The *35th* suffered heavily, its *141st Regiment* alone losing 1,089 officers and men, upwards of two-thirds of its fighting strength, and 19 machine guns.

On the VI. Corps front three British divisions, the *15th*, *29th*, and *17th*, were opposed by two German, the *3rd Bavarian* and *26th*. The former had a bad day on its right flank, where the *18th Bavarian Regiment* lost Guémappe and suffered 808 casualties. The *9th Grenadier Regiment*, already mentioned, was put in to counter-attack north of the Cambrai road, recovered some ground, and on its right beat off the renewed attacks of the *29th Division*. The whole division and the Grenadiers who had supported it were relieved on the night of the *24th* by the *221st Division*.

The *26th Division* was not only one of the hardest-fighting in the German Army, but also alert and well led. Realizing that Lone Copse valley afforded the British a good assembly position, the *125th Regiment* established a concealed outpost at a point where it could look down into the depression. It reported the assembly of the *17th Division's* troops half an hour before the assault, with disastrous consequences for them. The *26th Division* lost hardly any ground, and in addition to holding its own front was able to assist the counter-attack on Rœux.

North of the Scarpe, the left regiment of the *18th Division*, the *86th*, had just been relieved by the *161st* of the *185th Division*, the counter-attack division here. The *161st* was driven out of Rœux by the British *51st Division*, but retook the place by a counter-attack. The *86th Regiment* was then thrown in, but failed to recapture Rœux Station and the Chemical Works, and it was a battalion of the *65th Regiment*, *208th Division*, which carried on the beaten troops and recovered this important position at 9 P.M. The other two regiments of the *18th Division*, the *31st* and *55th*, were so severely handled that another regiment, the *89th Grenadier*—belonging to the *17th Division* but held in corps reserve—was brought up north of the railway, but failed to recover the line of the Rœux—Gavrelle road. The *18th Division* and all troops which had been attached to it were relieved on the *24th April* by the *208th*.

Only the *90th Regiment* on the left of the *17th Division* was involved in the morning assault. The battalion in the Oppy line was destroyed by the *63rd Division*, and the defence of Gavrelle then depended on a company in a quarry on the eastern side, which never reached its battle station. The reserve battalion was ordered to rally the troops which had been driven back and retake Gavrelle, but its counter-attack broke down completely. Next came the turn of the counter-attack division, the *185th*. Two battalions of the *28th Reserve Regiment* advanced across the open from the direction of Izel under heavy artillery fire, but were stopped by the infantry of the *63rd* and *87th Divisions* on the outskirts of Gavrelle. Further attempts next morning were equally decisively defeated.

Group Vimy, however, would not take no for an answer. It had now at its disposal the *1st Guard Reserve Division*, formerly counter-attack division to *Group Souchez*, further north, but sent down when it was discovered that the attack on La Coulotte was not serious. In the afternoon the *64th Reserve Regiment* of this division was put in to make the counter-attack from Mauville Farm which has been described in the text. The regimental commander was given control of all the troops already in front of Gavrelle, with orders to carry

them forward with his fresh battalions. The result was another costly failure. It is clear from the German accounts that though the British barrages caused heavy loss, it was in the last resort the machine guns of the defence which defeated these counter-attacks. The *64th Reserve Regiment* then relieved the shattered *90th* and *28th Reserve* in front of Gavrelle.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BATTLES OF ARRAS 1917 : THE BATTLE OF ARLEUX, 28TH/29TH APRIL

(Maps 3, 8 ; Sketches 13, 19)

SIR DOUGLAS HAIG'S INTENTIONS

THE French " April Offensives " and their aftermath will be described at a later stage in this narrative. Here they will be considered only in so far as they affected the immediate plans of Sir Douglas Haig. The Battles of Arras were being fought in compliance with the wishes of General Nivelle. The British offensive formed part of his strategic scheme, was subsidiary to his operations on the Aisne, and would not have been undertaken at Arras as an isolated venture. Now, after the British had become deeply committed, it seemed possible that the French offensive would be broken off abruptly.

On the 18th April Major-General F. B. Maurice, Director of Military Operations at the War Office, wrote to Sir Douglas Haig to inform him of an interview between the Prime Minister and M. Albert Thomas, French Minister of Munitions. M. Thomas had told Mr. Lloyd George that the French Government were determined not to engage in prolonged fighting such as had taken place on the Somme, and that unless during the first few days the Aisne offensive gave promise of realizing large material gains by an early date, it would be broken off. The view of the French Government, M. Thomas went on, was that the state of their man-power would not permit them to countenance heavy losses, and that time was on the side of the Entente, because it would allow Russia to recover from the effects of the revolution and enable the United States to place large forces in the field. Mr. Lloyd George had actually informed the War Cabinet of

this interview on the 16th, the day on which the French assault was delivered.

In reply, Sir Douglas Haig wrote that the struggle was following its normal course ; that the enemy's power of resistance had already been reduced, and that he must not be given time to recover and reorganize ; that the prospects of success in 1917 were good, if efforts were not now relaxed ; and that to break off offensive operations at an early date would probably be in the long run more costly in men and money than to fight on. At a conference in Paris on the 20th April attended by Mr. Lloyd George, it was decided that the operations should continue, but that another conference should be held in about a fortnight's time.

The British authorities, civil and military, were, however, receiving increasing proof of the French Government's hostility to General Nivelle and his offensive. The French Commander-in-Chief himself had no intention of desisting, and he told Sir Douglas Haig, on the 24th April at Amiens, that his Government had not either. Sir Douglas Haig pointed out that he desired to clear the Belgian ports before the autumn, in view of the submarine menace, and that if this could not be carried out by means of the present offensive it would have to be done by operating directly from the neighbourhood of Ypres. He emphasized the difficulty of his situation should the French stop the offensive after the British had exhausted themselves so far as to be incapable of carrying out the second plan. General Nivelle not only agreed to continue, but looked favourably upon a suggestion that the French should attack on either side of St. Quentin simultaneously with a British attack on the Hindenburg Line in the neighbourhood of Havrincourt.

It remained to be seen whether he would be allowed to fulfil his intentions. Suddenly summoned to Paris, Sir Douglas Haig had an interview with M. Painlevé on the 26th. The French Minister of War was undisguisedly pessimistic. He spoke as though the French had been defeated on the Aisne, and actually appeared to Sir Douglas Haig to be inviting from him a suggestion that General Nivelle should be replaced by General Pétain. It would have been improper for the British Commander-in-Chief to say so, even had he desired such a change, but he did not. He had reason to suppose that the advent of General Pétain would entail the cessation of the French

offensive, and in any case the appointment of a third French Commander-in-Chief within four months was to be deprecated. He did his best to reassure M. Painlevé. Later in the day he found the President of the Council, M. Ribot, averse to a change, as well as calmer and less pessimistic. Sir Douglas Haig was, however, disquieted. He requested the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to inform M. Painlevé that if the French offensive were stopped it would be considered a breach of faith.

Such was the atmosphere in which the plans for the next move at Arras were considered. In his Despatch, Sir Douglas Haig states that he decided to continue the Arras operations only to assist General Nivelle, "until such time as the results of the French offensive should have declared themselves". This statement accords with those which he made in private conversation during his visits to the battlefield and doubtless represents his views, even if his formal instructions to his Army commanders were more optimistically expressed. On the 24th, before meeting General Nivelle at Amiens, he informed General Allenby that he hoped the latter would be able to press the enemy back to the Drocourt—Quéant Switch with the troops at his disposal, and that if he did so, four fresh divisions would be provided for the assault on that line. On the 25th he saw Generals Rawlinson and Gough at Doullens and directed them to prepare plans for breaking the Hindenburg Line between Banteux and Havrincourt; General Rawlinson was to see General Franchet d'Espérey, commanding the G.A.N., and try to arrange that the French should take over a small portion of the British front north of St. Quentin, so as to be able to attack the city at the same time.

Owing to the Commander-in-Chief's absence in Paris, his place at a conference with Generals Horne and Allenby on the 26th was taken by Lieut.-General Kiggell, Chief of the General Staff. He informed the Army commanders that the British offensive would be continued unless the French operations were stopped; if they were, the Field-Marshal would turn to Flanders. He also explained that it was the doubt in Sir Douglas Haig's mind regarding French intentions which caused him to delay bringing down divisions from the Second Army, because if a *roulement*, or general interchange of troops, between the fronts of Flanders and Artois—Picardy were begun he would be unable to switch his efforts to the north again without

delay. This statement of his views is important. He had only three divisions in G.H.Q. reserve, and since he did not venture, while the fate of the French offensive hung in the balance, to employ at Arras any of the thirteen in the Second Army, the battle had to be continued mainly with tired and depleted formations.

The programme settled at the conference was as follows. On the 28th April there was to be a secondary operation, already arranged. This consisted of the capture by the First Army of Oppy and Arleux, which General Horne had been unable to undertake on the 23rd.¹ The Third Army was simultaneously to capture those eternal objectives, Rœux and Greenland Hill, and south of the Scarpe to bring the refused left flank of the VI. Corps up into line. Next, about the 3rd May, the offensive was to be renewed on a grand scale. The Third Army was to take Fontaine lez Croisilles, Chérisy, Vis en Artois, Boiry Notre Dame and Plouvain, and the First Fresnes les Montauban, Neuville, Fresnoy and Acheville. On the same day the Fifth was to renew the attack upon Bullecourt. If these operations were successful, the First and Third Armies would prepare to attack the Drocourt—Quéant Switch, if possible about the middle of May, when it was hoped that the Fourth and Fifth Armies would be ready to attack the Hindenburg Line between Banteux and Havrincourt. If this programme appears over-sanguine, it must not be overlooked that each step depended upon that which preceded it. Nevertheless, it was a big task, all the more so because there were only ten tanks fit to fight. General Horne had hoped for a few to use in the suburbs of Lens, but was informed by Lieut.-General Kiggell that eight had been promised to the Fifth Army for the attack on Bullecourt and the other two to the Third.

Wire-cutting in the zone of the First Army had been going on for some time. The Third Army's artillery preparation was begun as soon as the fighting of the last phase had died down. It included counter-battery fire for destruction, harassing fire by night, and bombardment with gas shell. The big 12-inch and 9.2-inch guns on railway mountings were advanced to the Triangle on the 24th and brought into action again, their chief target being the important sidings at Brebières.

After persistently shelling the British trenches throughout the 27th, the enemy opened an intense bombardment

¹ See p. 379.

astride the Monchy—Pelves road, at the junction of the 3rd and 12th Divisions, at 9 P.M. This was followed by a strong attack against their inner flanks, which was completely repulsed by the fire of the 76th and 35th Brigades.¹

OPERATIONS OF THE THIRD ARMY 28TH APRIL

The 28th April was a mild, bright day, though visibility was poor. The VI. Corps south of the Scarpe was required only to blunt off the northern flank of the Monchy salient. On paper it did not seem a hard task, yet it was a well-nigh hopeless one unless Rœux were also taken. It was to be carried out by the 12th Division (Major-General A. B. Scott), supported by the artillery of the 17th Division and the XLVIII. (Army) Brigade R.F.A. in addition to its own.

The attack was launched at 4.25 A.M. on the whole front. The 35th Brigade (Br.-General B. Vincent) had two objectives. The first was the uncaptured northern portion of Bayonet Trench and Rifle Trench, which ran from it at right angles and was in the hands of the enemy from the junction to the point where it crossed the Monchy—Pelves Mill road. The second was a north-and-south line through Pelves Mill. On the right the left wing of the 7/Norfolk was almost annihilated by fire from Rifle Trench, which appeared to have been scarcely damaged by the artillery. The right companies, already in Rifle Trench east of the road, went forward towards the second objective at 5.45 A.M., but were almost immediately held up, the men taking refuge in shell-holes from the terrific machine-gun fire. The left battalion, the 5/R. Berkshire, captured the whole of Bayonet Trench up to the Scarpe and 150 yards of Rifle Trench, but the 7/Suffolk, despite two gallant efforts, failed to reach the second objective. Frequent attempts on that day and the next did nothing to improve the position. Though the section of Rifle Trench held by the enemy was only about five hundred yards long he made such good use of a support trench behind it and fought so stoutly with the bomb that he was not finally ejected. Once again, however, the chief obstacle was the fire of machine guns from the valley of the Scarpe.

¹ German regimental accounts show that this was an ambitious venture, to recover the front line lost on the 24th. It was carried out by three battalions, one from the 221st Division and two from the 26th. The Germans claim to have reoccupied some ground, but if so it was ground not held by the British.

The XVII. Corps, which now held Mount Pleasant Wood, had as objective a line from just south of Rœux to the point where the Plouvain—Gavrelle and Fampoux—Fresnes roads crossed and thence along the former road to the right flank of the XIII. Corps. This was nowhere more than half a mile distant and considerably less on the left flank. On the other hand, the two divisions which were to carry out the attack, the 34th and 37th, were not really fit for the task.

A period of the War had been reached when the infantry, the sole source of man-power for all odd jobs, was being excessively "milked". We have seen, for instance, that the VI. Corps had to provide 4,000 men from four divisions for labour and other tasks behind the lines.¹ Within the battalion, again, there were, exclusive of the transport, many practically non-combatant specialists. Brigade and divisional headquarters employed considerable numbers. The consequence was that a battalion now seldom took more than 500 all ranks into action, and sometimes less than 400. Should it suffer 200 battle casualties in a series of attacks, have in addition 100 sick—as it well might in weather such as that of the first three weeks of this April—be withdrawn for a rest of a week, and during that period receive a draft of 200 reinforcements, then that draft would constitute the bulk of its fighting strength when next engaged. The men might not have been under fire or had more than three months' training in England, the junior officers might be almost equally raw, and the few days since their arrival might have been taken up with digging trenches or unloading stores. This was largely the case with the 34th Division. The other side of the picture is seen in the 37th. Here the drafts had not arrived; battalions went into action on the 28th April not much above 200 strong; and companies had only one or two officers. At least, however, officers and men had experience, and the condition of such battalions was probably preferable to that of the stronger units in the 34th Division.

In view of the difficulty found by the infantry in keeping close to the barrage when it was passing through Rœux, Major-General Nicholson, commanding the 34th Division, made special arrangements on this occasion. Instead of advancing at a uniform pace, the barrage was to make one bound of 100 yards after a four minutes' rest on the pre-

¹ See p. 195.

vious line, then—on reaching the houses—three successive bounds after pauses of eight, seven, and seven minutes. After clearing the houses the remaining lifts were to be at the rate of 100 yards every four minutes. The field artillery support consisted of the divisional artillery of the 9th and 51st Divisions, two batteries of the CLX. Brigade of the 34th Division, and the XIV. (Army) Brigade R.H.A. and XXIII. (Army) Brigade R.F.A., under the command of the division's own C.R.A., Br.-General W. J. K. Rettie.

The 101st Brigade (Br.-General R. C. Gore), on a broad front between the Scarpe and the railway, put all its infantry into the attack: 15/Royal Scots, 10/Lincolnshire, and 11/Suffolk in line, with a company of the 16/Royal Scots attached to each to mop up the buildings in its rear. On the right the first waves of the 15/Royal Scots entered Rœux and even dug in beyond it, but the supports were held up by fire from the woodlands in the valley.¹ North of the village the barrage appeared to jump from one side of the buildings to the other without touching them. Despite all the bombardment the houses were still high enough to afford good shelter to machine guns, and there was wire in the hedges west of the château. In face of hot fire the attack nowhere reached the Gavrelle—Rœux road. At 8 A.M. a counter-attack drove the troops back to their starting-line. A large body of Germans even passed through Mount Pleasant Wood, but were mown down by shrapnel in the open, and the survivors were afterwards ejected from the wood with the aid of Stokes mortars.

The 103rd Brigade (Br.-General C. J. Griffin ²) was held up on the right immediately north of the railway, but its left battalion, the 25/Northumberland Fusiliers, reached a line but little short of its objective. Major-General Nicholson even hoped that affairs had gone sufficiently well to permit him to move troops of the 102nd Brigade along the railway after dark so as to attack the Chemical Works from the north. For this it would be necessary that the 103rd should first clear the enemy from all buildings north of the railway. As the afternoon wore on, however, he decided that the situation was too complicated and uncertain for such an operation. This decision was

¹ German reports show that a strong force of this brigade, "four hundred English and Scottish troops", went far beyond their objective and reached the ridge between Rœux and Plouvain. Here they were surrounded and almost all forced to surrender. See Note at end of Chapter.

² He had assumed command on 23rd in place of Br.-General H. E. Trevor, evacuated sick.

undoubtedly correct; for the most advanced troops of the 103rd Brigade were lying in shell-holes, with a gap of 200 yards between their right and the railway and a similar gap between their left and the 37th Division. They actually fell back during the night.

There was nothing for it then but to employ the 102nd Brigade (Br.-General N. A. Thomson¹) in yet another frontal attack. This time the divisional commander decided upon an attempt to rush the buildings immediately north and south of the railway at 3 A.M. on the 29th without supporting fire, though the heavy artillery was to carry out a bombardment ceasing at midnight. The assault failed once again, partly because the artillery preparation was still inadequate and largely misdirected, but mainly on account of the time taken by the transmission of orders and the movement to the position of assembly. The 22/Northumberland Fusiliers, after struggling through crowded trenches, managed to arrive before Zero hour; but the 23rd Battalion, which was further from the front and received its orders later, did not come up, despite all possible haste, until 4 A.M. The attacks were therefore delivered separately, with the almost inevitable result. It is a melancholy tale, this of the successive failures to take a group of eviscerated factory buildings, and there would be no profit in dealing with this phase at greater length.

The 37th Division (Major-General H. B. Williams) attacked with all three brigades in line, supported by the 4th Division artillery, that of the 34th less two batteries, and the LII. (Army) Brigade, under the command of Br.-General Tudor, 9th Division artillery.² In this case also the rate of the creeping barrage was not uniform, the bounds being of 100 yards in four, six, seven, five, and five minutes successively.

The 112th Brigade (Br.-General R. C. M. Maclachlan) had the 10/L. North Lancashire and 6/Bedfordshire in first line. Both battalions apparently mistook a newly-dug trench some two hundred yards from their starting-line for another (Cuthbert Trench) which lay 300 yards further on and not far short of their objective. They, therefore, halted at the first trench in the belief that they

¹ He had succeeded Br.-General T. P. B. Ternan while the brigade was in rest.

² It is of some interest to note that the artillery supporting the 37th Division, commanded by a C.R.A. from another division, included neither any of his batteries nor any of its own.

had reached the second. In any case, they could scarcely have made more ground than they did owing to enfilade fire from the Chemical Works, to face which a flank was formed in a communication trench.

The 8/Somerset L.I. and 8/Lincolnshire of the 63rd Brigade (Br.-General E. L. Challenor) both bore to the left of their allotted zone of attack. Part of both battalions and men of the 4/Middlesex, two companies of which were in support to the Somerset, swept down the valley, driving the Germans before them. They passed round the south end of Hollow Copse and actually crossed the front trench of the system defending Fresnes, a mile beyond their objective. The 10/York & Lancaster, the left support battalion, reached a point between Square Wood and the cross-roads south of it. Just beyond Fresnes, the Germans could be seen bringing up teams to withdraw the guns. The men of the 63rd Brigade inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy and broke up his counter-attacks; but the Germans were presently reinforced, and after some hours' fighting there were only a few of the British left unwounded. Possibly the speedy intervention of reserves would have led to a considerable success, perhaps even to the clearance of Greenland Hill and the turning of the German line opposed to the 34th Division. There was, however, no such visibility as on the 23rd, and it was not realized how far the advance had penetrated.¹ In any case the corps reserve consisted of only a single brigade of the 9th Division. In these circumstances the survivors fell back to the Gavrelle—Plouvain road.

In the attack of the 23rd April the right of the 111th Brigade (Br.-General C. W. Compton) had reached a line 200 yards east of the Rœux—Gavrelle road, while its left had reached the Plouvain—Gavrelle road.² Before the next operation began a company of the 9/North Staffordshire (Pioneers) was put at the disposal of Br.-General Compton to hold the advanced front on the left and a trench connecting the two roads. The 13/Royal Fusiliers and 13/Rifle Brigade had virtually to come up into line with the pioneer company, the distance to be covered being only 800 yards at its greatest. This was the only part of the Third Army front where the attack was successful, the Plouvain—Gavrelle road being reached from its junction with the Fampoux—Fresnes road northwards.

That night the 9th Division relieved the 112th and

¹ See Note at end of Chapter.

² See p. 397.

63rd Brigades, and on the night of the 29th it also took over the front of the 111th. It was only after this relief that the precise front held was ascertained and the discovery made that Cuthbert Trench had in fact never been taken by the 37th Division. In the trench mistaken for it there was found on the 30th April a party of forty men of that division who had been there for 48 hours without food or water. As the 9th Division decided to evacuate this trench and also abandoned, after some local fighting, a portion of the Plouvain—Gavrelle road north of the cross-roads, there was little enough to show for the action of the 28th April, which had reduced the 37th Division to a shadow and virtually destroyed its 63rd Brigade. Only 140 prisoners had been captured by the XVII. Corps.

OPERATIONS OF THE FIRST ARMY

Astride the Arras—Lille road the original German third line formed a big loop round the village of Arleux. From the eastern side of this loop a switch joined it to the next line of defence, the Rouvroy—Fresnes position, west of Neuville. The First Army had been ordered to break through the Oppy line—already in British hands to north of Gavrelle—capture Oppy and Arleux, and thus establish itself over half-way across the Arleux loop.

The boundary between the XIII. and Canadian Corps ran from 300 yards south of Arleux to the southern corner of the wood south of Fresnoy. On the right of the XIII. Corps the task of the 63rd Division was to form a flank for the protection of the right of the 2nd. The salient created by the capture of Gavrelle necessitated an attack in echelon. One battalion was therefore to advance from Gavrelle for a distance of 750 yards north of the Fresnes road, establishing its right flank along that road; another, forming up west of the Oppy line and in the area previously occupied by the 2nd Division, was to advance due eastward until it was in alignment with the first. There was an element of risk in this plan because the two attacks were separate, with separate barrages, starting from bases a thousand yards apart, and with zones which came into contact only on the final objective, one thousand yards E.N.E. of Gavrelle.

The whole operation was entrusted to the 188th Brigade (Br.-General R. E. S. Prentice), the southern attack from Gavrelle being carried out by the 2/Royal

Marines and the northern by the 1/Royal Marines. The former was only a partial success, and the latter was a complete failure. The 2/Royal Marines gained a good deal of ground and beat off a succession of counter-attacks, but suffered heavy losses from artillery fire and fell back to almost its original position at dusk. A little garrison, about a platoon in strength, held on, however, to the windmill north of the railway, where there was almost continuous fighting all that day and the next. The 1/Royal Marines was driven back by a counter-attack and, exposed to machine-gun fire in enfilade from a strong point on the railway, was almost annihilated. The 1/H.A.C. captured the strong point by a bombing attack, but too late to aid the Marines, and was afterwards bombed out by the enemy, who actually regained some ground in the Oppy line that had been captured in the previous attack.

This failure was very unfortunate for the 2nd Division (Major-General C. E. Pereira), whose right flank was thereby uncovered. The division had in any case a difficult task, to carry out which it could not muster more than about 3,500 rifles. It had first to break through the strongly-wired Oppy line. Then it would be faced by Oppy Wood, with its tangle of fallen trees, lying to its right centre. Behind the wood was the village, the two stretching a thousand yards from west to east. And a village with a wood on its near side to break up the formation of an attack had proved on many occasions one of the most difficult of all obstacles.

The artillery support was provided by the 2nd Division artillery, the CLXX. Brigade of the 31st Division, and the XXXIV., LXXXIV., and CCCXV. (Army) Brigades R.F.A. under the command of Br.-General C. H. Sanders, C.R.A. of the 2nd Division. There was a double 18-pdr. creeping barrage, one half moving 200 yards ahead of the other, the inner firing shrapnel and the outer high explosive, with 4.5-inch howitzer, heavy artillery, and machine-gun barrages in advance of that of the 18-pdrs. Artillery support was not an easy problem, because the field guns had to be emplaced either behind the crest of Vimy Ridge, in which case the range was long, or on the forward slope, where they were very exposed and ammunition supply was a matter of difficulty.

The two brigades carrying out the assault formed up on tapes laid by the 226th and 483rd Field Companies R.E. On the right the 6th Brigade (Br.-General R. K.

Walsh) did comparatively well at first. The 13/Essex, though its right was held up by uncut wire, reached some practice trenches due south of Oppy, but had to detail a company to protect its right flank. The 17/Middlesex reached the east side of Oppy Wood. The enemy, however, fought stubbornly in the village, firing from loopholes cut in the walls, and prevented further progress. As the other two battalions, 1/King's and 2/South Staffordshire, were fully employed as "moppers up" and carrying parties, the 23/Royal Fusiliers of the 99th Brigade was put at the disposal of Br.-General Walsh to be employed in clearing Oppy. By the time it was ready—about 12 noon—the enemy, mainly by pressure on the open right flank, had forced the brigade back to the German front line, and this was evacuated in the evening.¹

The 5th Brigade (Br.-General G. M. Bullen-Smith) had the 2/Highland L.I. on the right, the 2/Oxford & Bucks L.I. on the left, and the 17/Royal Fusiliers as carriers. The wire was not thoroughly cut, but three gaps were found and the Highland L.I. made a fourth with wire-cutters. Both battalions reached the sunken Oppy—Arleux road. Here the brigade's left was secure, as the Canadians had taken Arleux,² but the right had to be refused when the 6th Brigade was ejected from Oppy Wood. Eventually the Highland L.I. was forced back to the German second line, where it stood firm, beating off two further counter-attacks.

The left of the XIII. Corps, though it had not reached its final objective, was now sufficiently far advanced to cover the right of the Canadians in Arleux. At 7 P.M. Lieut.-General Congreve issued orders to the two divisions to capture that part of the Oppy line still in German hands, that is, from about fifty yards south of the railway to the Willerval—Oppy road. He first fixed the hour at 3 A.M. on the 29th, but postponed it until 4 A.M., at which time it would still be dark. A series of heavy artillery bombardments was carried out during the night.

For the 63rd Division's part in the operation Major-General Lawrie placed at the disposal of Br.-General

¹ The Germans claim to have side-stepped to the flanks, allowed the British to enter the wood, and then moved back in their rear, "as if a door into a great reception room had been opened and then closed again as soon as sufficient guests had entered".

² The 2/Oxford & Bucks L.I., having a frontage too great for its scanty numbers, a company commander of the 8th Canadian Battalion spontaneously and on his own responsibility took over a portion of it.

Prentice, commanding the 188th Brigade, a composite battalion formed from the 4/Bedfordshire and 7/Royal Fusiliers of the 190th. The infantry of the division was by now reduced to a shadow, and the 14/Worcestershire, the pioneer battalion, was brought up to hold the line south of Gavrelle. In the 2nd Division Major-General Pereira ordered the 99th Brigade (Br.-General R. O. Kellett) to take over the front of the 6th.

In general it may be said that the set attack failed, but that improvised bombing attacks attained a certain degree of success. The 188th Brigade reached its objective but was driven out almost immediately. A counter-attack against the front south of Gavrelle was, however, repulsed by the Anson and the 14/Worcestershire. The attack of the 22/Royal Fusiliers and 1/R. Berkshire¹ of the 99th Brigade at first fared little better. The Fusiliers failed to penetrate the second belt of wire, except at two points, where parties of about a platoon in each case forced their way into the trench. That on the right, led by 2nd Lieutenant S. F. Jeffcoat, performed a magnificent feat. Dividing his little party into two, one to work northward and one—under his personal command—southward, Lieutenant Jeffcoat bombed his way down some four hundred yards south of the divisional boundary till he came into touch with men of the 4/Bedfordshire and 1/H.A.C. of the 63rd Division, who had recaptured the strong point on the railway and were now bombing northward. Meanwhile, however, the 1/R. Berkshire, whose right flank was in the air, and two companies of the 24/Royal Fusiliers (5th Brigade) on its left, after capturing the Oppy line, had been driven out by the sixth counter-attack launched by the enemy. The German bombers had promptly turned south and taken Lieutenant Jeffcoat's party in rear.

Lieutenant Jeffcoat managed to get a message through to his battalion commander, Lieut.-Colonel R. Barnett-Barker, that it would be possible to dribble men out to him in small parties along the railway, and that if they came well supplied with bombs he hoped to be able to clear the Oppy line. Lieut.-Colonel Barnett-Barker had no troops of his own left, but two companies of the 23/Royal Fusiliers had been handed over to him by Br.-General Kellett.

¹ One company of this battalion had been absorbed in the previous day's fighting and was not available. The battalion went into action with a strength of 265 all ranks.

One of these made its way into the Oppy line by the railway, and supported by parties of the 68rd Division, cleared the trenches up to a point 200 yards from the south-west corner of Oppy Wood, a distance of nearly a thousand yards. Lieutenant Jeffcoat, whose gallantry and tactical sense had so largely contributed to the measure of success gained, was mortally wounded after explaining the situation to the commander of the reinforcements.

At the day's end the situation at Gavrelle itself was unchanged. The British post at the windmill still held out, but was more or less isolated. The Oppy line was in British hands to within two hundred yards of Oppy Wood; thence to the Willerval—Oppy road it remained in the possession of the enemy; from that point the British front followed the support trench for 500 yards, then turning north-westward to the Arleux—Neuvireuil road, where the XIII. Corps joined hands with the Canadian.

The fighting in the zone of attack of the XIII. Corps had been both fierce and stubborn. Weary as they were, the two British divisions had striven magnificently.¹ The enemy's counter-attacks, too, both across the open and along the trenches, had been made with bravery and determination, particularly by the troops of the *1st Guard Reserve Division*, which held the front from south of Gavrelle to just north of Oppy. The volume of artillery fire had been tremendous, especially in the bombardments of Oppy by the British and of Gavrelle by the Germans, but intense all along the front. The German fire had been particularly accurate and effective; in fact, most of the British stores of bombs and small arms ammunition were blown up and the supplies of water spilt prior to the 99th Brigade's attack on the 29th April—to the very serious prejudice of that operation. Though in the two days' fighting only about 600 prisoners had been captured by the XIII. Corps, both the *1st Guard Reserve Division* and the *111th* north of it had obviously suffered serious losses, their battalions having been frequently caught in the open by the British heavy artillery. That, however, was the best that could be said so far as the XIII. Corps was concerned.

¹ Three V.C.s were won in the course of the struggle: by 2nd Lieuts. A. O. Pollard and R. L. Haine, and Lce.-Corpl. J. Welch. The two first-named, both of the 1/H.A.C., 68rd Division, had been the inspiration of the bomb fighting in the Oppy line both on the 28th and on the 29th. Lce.-Corpl. Welch, of the 1/R. Berkshire, 2nd Division, had shown extraordinary valour in defence of the section of the Oppy line temporarily held by his battalion.

Otherwise, despite the gallantry and self-sacrifice of the troops, their effort had only just sufficed to support the local gains of the Canadians at Arleux.

The Canadian Corps launched its attack on Arleux village with three battalions of the 2nd Brigade (1st Canadian Division) in most gallant and determined fashion, and achieved the only tangible success of the whole operation.

On the right, the 8th Battalion (90th Rifles) carried the German front trench. Its right then pressed on over a rise of ground and crossed the Arleux—Oppy road, reaching its objective in touch with the 2/Oxford & Bucks L.I. of the XIII. Corps. Its left was held up by a strong point in the embankment of the sunken track south of the village until reinforced by a company of the 7th Battalion (1st B.C. Regiment) from support, which overcame this opposition and carried the attack forward through the southern ruins of the village. Here a number of Germans, estimated at two officers and 100 men, were taken prisoner. The companies then consolidated a line along their objective, through Arleux Wood, east of the village.

In the centre, the 10th Battalion was held up at the start by two machine guns concealed near the wire entanglement until their crews were bombed from the flanks and shot. Pressing on, the battalion encountered resistance within the village. This was quickly overcome, and a German machine gun was silenced by rifle grenades from a flank. On emerging on the eastern side of the ruins the leading Canadian troops saw the Germans retiring rapidly but in such good order that in the bad light they were at first mistaken for part of the British attack. The objective was reached only three minutes after the scheduled time (6.25 A.M.), the advance of nearly a thousand yards across the battered German trenches and through the ruins of the village having been completed in two hours.

On the left, the 5th Battalion (Western Cavalry) carried the front trench with its right and centre and crossed the open ground north of the village to join up with the left of the 10th Battalion. Its left was held up by uncut wire and suffered severely. Not until the support company arrived and, seeing the dilemma, bombed up the trench from the right where this had previously been broken through and cleared away the opposition, could further progress be made. The advance towards the objective, the sunken Arleux—Méricourt track north of the village, was then

continued, leaving moppers-up to clear the dug-outs. Unfortunately, the 25th Battalion (Nova Scotia Rifles) of the 2nd Canadian Division, which was to attack alongside on the left and form a defensive flank, had been delayed. Its assault companies met uncut wire and stiff opposition which was only overcome after heavy fighting, and a considerable time elapsed before the situation could be unravelled. The battalion finally discovered that it had mistaken a sunken road through the German front line and about three hundred yards from the jumping-off trench for the objective, the sunken track another six hundred yards beyond. The left of the 5th Battalion was therefore in the air, and its advancing waves were enfiladed by two machine guns on the left flank before they reached the Arleux—Méricourt track. This fire, together with the open flank, compelled the left of the battalion to fall back to the German front trench, where it regained touch with the 25th Battalion.

As the Germans did not consider the retention of the Arleux loop-trench to be vital, so long as the Fresnoy line in rear was held, the commander of the *111th Division* accepted the situation and forbade a counter-attack. On the afternoon of the 29th, the left of the 5th Canadian Battalion and the whole of the 25th advanced after an artillery preparation and occupied the objective originally laid down, thereby completing the operation and bringing the number of prisoners taken up to 372. The new Canadian position lay about four hundred yards distant from the Fresnoy line. It was only a local success, but at this stage of the battle even local successes were hard enough to win, and it must be accounted a fine feat of arms.

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The returns of the Adjutant-General, Lieut.-General Sir G. H. Fowke, give the casualties of the Third Army for the month of April as 52,097, and those of the First Army as 27,635, out of a total of 104,862 in the whole force. The losses of the First Army cannot all be ranked as casualties due to the Battles of Arras, as a large part of the Army's front was not engaged in active operations. It is not easy to apportion losses in such cases, but perhaps 24,000 of the First Army's may be attributed to the battle, and the rest to the wastage of trench warfare, slightly increased by the liveliness of the front. The casualties of the Fifth Army in the First Attack on Bullecourt and

the German Attack on Lagnicourt were approximately 4,200, making the total losses so far incurred over 78,000.

The sick wastage for the month numbered 1,896 officers and 49,260 other ranks. These latter figures comprise little over two and a half per cent. of a force numbering, with labour units, 1,910,400, and, in the greater proportion of cases, represent periods of absence from duty of a few weeks or even a few days.

The captures during April by the three Armies engaged in the offensive, including perhaps 300 prisoners taken in the final operations against the outpost villages, were 17,959 prisoners and 254 guns; 11,295 prisoners and 185 guns by the Third Army, 5,784 prisoners and 69 guns by the First, and 880 prisoners by the Fifth. This total of just on 18,000 prisoners in a month may be compared with the 39,000 prisoners taken by the British in the twenty weeks of the Battles of the Somme.

NOTE

THE GERMANS IN THE BATTLE OF ARLEUX

From the Scarpe to about 1,000 yards south of Gavrelle the *203th Division* had four regiments in line, from left to right the *65th* (detached from the *185th Division* and the only regiment of that division not used up in the Second Battle of the Scarpe), *65th Reserve*, *185th*, and *25th*, the two first approximately opposed to the British *34th Division* and the other two to the *37th*.

The attack of the *34th Division* passed right through Rœux, but left a few men holding out in the village. The British then pressed on to the high ground above Plouvain, where 400 "English and Scottish troops" established themselves. These survivors beat off the first German counter-attack, but the reserve battalion of the *65th Regiment* was then brought up to attack them from the south. Almost surrounded, the greater part of the British were captured. The Germans then counter-attacked Rœux, regained it, and actually, as has been stated, got a footing in the old British line. From this, however, they were speedily ejected.

The right regiment, the *25th*, had interesting adventures. Its history states that a British battalion with machine guns was seen advancing along the Gavrelle—Fresnes road, north of the regimental sector. The machine-gun company of the right battalion took this column and its line of retreat under such effective fire that it surrendered in a body to the division on the right. The reference is to the *2/R. Marines*. The German account is exaggerated, yet this battalion, with both flanks in the air, did lose a very large number of prisoners. Meanwhile part of the British *37th Division* had broken clean through, driven the three battalion staffs out of Hollow Copse,

only narrowly been stopped from entering the rear line of defence west of Fresnes, and beaten off a counter-attack by the reserve battalion.¹ At midday a battalion of the *1st Guard Reserve Division*, from the sector on the right, attacked this detachment from north and north-west ; the battalion of the *25th* renewed its attack simultaneously ; and the British were overwhelmed, losing 125 prisoners.

The *1st Guard Reserve Division* had only one of its own regiments in line, the *64th Reserve*, the *75th Regiment* of the *17th Division*, not engaged on the 23rd April, having remained in the right sector. The right battalion of the *64th Reserve*, north of the Gavrelle—Fresnes road, was almost destroyed by the 63rd Division's attack. A counter-attack by a battalion of the *2nd Guard Reserve Regiment* restored the situation, and, it is claimed, retook the windmill ; but this was in British hands at the end of the day. The *75th Regiment*, on the right, had only one battalion on a front of a thousand yards, from just north of the railway to north of Oppy. The support and reserve battalions were thrown in to counter-attack, and by about noon had regained their regimental sector, though only after fierce fighting with parties of the British 2nd Division.

From north of Oppy to Acheville was the *111th Division*, which had two battalions, on the right one of the *76th Regiment* and on the left one of the *73rd*, in the forward trench of the Arleux Loop, or "Nose", as it was called by the Germans. Here the Canadians broke through the Arleux Loop in the sector of the *73rd*, attacked from the rear and captured the companies still holding out, rolled up the battalion of the *76th* from the flank thus opened, and captured the western side of the loop and the village of Arleux. As stated in the text, the divisional commander forbade a counter-attack. The front line battalion of the *73rd Regiment* had 400 men missing.

¹ See p. 417.

CHAPTER XVII

THE BATTLES OF ARRAS 1917 : THE THIRD BATTLE OF THE SCARPE, 3RD/4TH MAY

(Maps 8, 8 ; Sketches 13, 19)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

BETWEEN the 28th April and the 3rd May, when the next operation on the Arras front was carried out, Sir Douglas Haig received news calling for deep reflection. That which he had feared, the removal of General Nivelle from the command of the French Armies, had not yet come to pass, but he was given good reason to believe that it would take place very shortly. That the fall of General Nivelle would involve the cessation of his offensive seemed certain. In these circumstances, even if the British could reach Cambrai, there was little object in doing so, because the French would not be coming up on their right. Sir Douglas Haig decided, therefore, that if the French did break off operations, he would attempt only to attain a good defensive line, carry out surprise attacks with the object of keeping the enemy pinned down, and launch his offensive in Flanders as soon as possible.

To imagine, however, that he now merely proposed to turn from one objective to another would be to underestimate the effect of the news upon his mind. He had agreed to carry out the rôle assigned to him by General Nivelle in a combined operation which aimed at a speedy and decisive victory over the German forces on the Western Front. It is true that he had always considered General Nivelle too sanguine and had entered upon his own operations at Arras with no intention of accepting failure to reach all his objectives as a reverse. Yet the Arras offensive had marked a departure from the methods of attrition of the Somme.

Now, as he showed plainly in a memorandum addressed on 1st May to General Robertson for the information of the War Cabinet, he was determined, if the French reduced their efforts, to return to wearing-down tactics for a further period. Indeed, all he claimed for his Flanders scheme was that "success in this attempt is now, in my opinion, "reasonably possible and would have valuable results on "land and sea; while even if a full measure of success is "not gained we shall be attacking the enemy on a front "where he cannot refuse to fight, and where, therefore, "our purpose of wearing him down can be given effect "to."

It seemed to him almost certain that the French would not now persevere with their main offensive, in which case it would be unwise for the British to persevere with theirs. On the other hand, if all activity on the Western Front ceased the effect upon the offensive plans of Italy and Russia might be unfortunate. His solution was to limit his efforts for the next few weeks to what he might hope to accomplish with relatively small loss and to begin his operations for the clearance of the Belgian coast as soon as possible after the Italian and Russian offensives had been launched. Meanwhile, it was urgently necessary, he wrote, that the French should keep up the pressure by means of minor actions such as he himself was contemplating and that they should relieve the British of at least the equivalent of the frontage which the latter had taken over in order to permit the formation of General Nivelle's striking force.

On the 30th April Sir Douglas Haig held a conference at Noyelle Vion, the new Third Army headquarters, with Generals Horne, Allenby and Gough. He confided to them that, in view of the information he had received, all hope of joining hands with the French about Cambrai was gone. He told them that his plan was now to reach, by about the 15th May, the line Lens, Acheville, Fresnoy, Greenland Hill, Bois du Vert, and Riencourt; when that had been attained he would decide whether to attack the Drocourt—Quéant Switch or transfer troops elsewhere.¹ He afterwards informed General Gough that he intended to entrust to him the northern half of the operations in Flanders.

At the Franco-British conference in Paris on the 20th April it had been decided to hold another meeting in about a fortnight's time.² The date fixed was Friday the 4th

¹ See Appendix 51.

² See p. 411.

May, and the Governmental conference was to be preceded by a military discussion. Sir Douglas Haig, who had been requested to meet Mr. Lloyd George on the 3rd and also desired to see General Pétain before the conference, reached Paris on the evening of the 2nd after a last interview with Generals Allenby and Gough concerning the attack which was to be launched next day.

On the morning of the 3rd he visited General Pétain. The latter had just been appointed Chief of the General Staff, with extended powers—either, it appeared, as a step up the ladder to the post of Commander-in-Chief, or as a compromise between elements still striving to retain General Nivelle and those resolved upon his removal. Sir Douglas Haig put before General Pétain the views which have been outlined and raised the question of handing back some of his front to the French. General Pétain said that he would have to reply in writing and mentioned that the French had only 35,000 men in their dépôts. That night Sir Douglas Haig had an interview with Mr. Lloyd George, who told him that he would press upon the French any plan upon which the British Commander-in-Chief and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff were agreed. Times had changed since the Calais Conference.

At the military conference on the 4th Great Britain was represented by Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig and General Robertson; France, by Generals Nivelle and Pétain. It was agreed that if the enemy were given time to recover from the effects of the Allied attacks, their fruits would be lost. It seemed obvious that the present policy of the German High Command was to encourage the people to hold out until the submarine campaign had taken effect, and easy successes, such as could be gained by attacking Russia or Italy, might enable this to be done; on the other hand, the original plan of the Allies was no longer operative; the rupture of the hostile front could no longer be contemplated and the object should now be to exhaust the enemy's power of resistance; this object could be attained by attacking relentlessly with limited objectives, while making the fullest possible use of artillery.

Two further conclusions, of which official note was not taken but which were none the less of the highest importance, were as follows:

- i. The British would assume responsibility for the main operations, the French supporting them by vigorous

attacks and by taking over a portion of the British front ;

ii. The strictest secrecy must be observed, only the broad principles being confided to the Governments, without details of dates or places.

The last resolution was only too necessary because in France the pros and cons of the Aisne offensive had been canvassed up and down the country, especially by members of the Chamber of Deputies. It was unnecessary to set on record that the agreement for the subordination of the British Commander-in-Chief to his French colleague no longer held good. That agreement had applied to a particular series of operations, which was about to end.

In the afternoon the general conference assembled at the Quai d'Orsay.¹ It was chiefly concerned with the Macedonian theatre.² As regards the Western Front it registered the views of the generals as to the necessity of keeping up the pressure by means of attacks with limited objectives. The debates did not end on the 4th, but Sir Douglas Haig left Paris before the day's session was over to return to his advanced headquarters. During his absence the last general attack at Arras had been launched.

THE HOUR OF THE ASSAULT

In view of Sir Douglas Haig's decision to limit the future scope of the Arras offensive preparatory to switching his effort to Flanders, it may appear strange that a fresh attack should have been launched by three Armies on a frontage of over fourteen miles. It must, however, be borne in mind that plans had already been prepared and orders issued for a general offensive, at a moment when the French were still fighting hard on the Aisne, when there was still a possibility that they would continue the battle, and when it was of the highest importance to give them powerful aid. Even now, indeed, it was not certain that their efforts would cease, if the important attacks which they

¹ Present, for Great Britain, Mr. Lloyd George (Prime Minister), Lord Robert Cecil (acting Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs during Mr. Arthur Balfour's absence in the United States), with Admiral Sir John Jellicoe (First Sea Lord), General Sir W. R. Robertson, and Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig ; for France, M. Ribot (President of the Council), M. Painlevé (War), Admiral Lacaze (Marine), and M. Bourgeois, with Generals Pétain and Nivelle. Curiously enough, the British secretariat failed to take note that Sir Douglas Haig was present.

² The somewhat lengthy and complicated decisions on the Salonika campaign are given in "Macedonia" Vol. I., pp. 315 (military questions) and 350 (political questions).

were to carry out on the 4th and 5th May gained a considerable measure of success. In view of these operations and of the fact that he was about to urge them to further efforts, it was not the time for Sir Douglas Haig to close down the battle. It is also to be noted that the "good defensive line" postulated by the Commander-in-Chief had nowhere been completely attained. Finally, in the course of the battle general actions had hitherto been far more successful than local ones.

It was therefore arranged that on the 3rd May the Fifth, Third, and First Armies should attack with the object of securing Riencourt, and Hendecourt (Fifth); Fontaine, Chérisy, St. Rohart Factory, the Bois du Sart, Pelves, and Plouvain Station (Third); Oppy and Fresnoy (First). General Allenby also issued instructions that if the enemy appeared to be demoralized or wore himself out by repeated and fruitless counter-attacks a general advance should take place after the fall of darkness, conducted in silence and without rifle fire, to capture artillery and make ground towards the Drocourt—Quéant Switch. The approximate objectives given by him were from Hendecourt to Vis en Artois and Boiry Notre Dame, and Plouvain. This project was promptly vetoed by Sir Douglas Haig, who did not consider that the British infantry had sufficient training to carry it out. Yet despite the objection to a night operation, the attack of the 3rd May was in its first stage to be that and nothing else.

In the Fifth Army the I. Anzac Corps was to attack the Hindenburg Line in the re-entrant between Quéant and Bullecourt. Their knowledge of the characteristics of this ground, their desire to surprise the enemy and baffle his machine gunners, and their reliance on the remarkable gift for keeping direction possessed by their troops, induced the Australian commanders to press for a start in darkness. In this they were supported by General Gough. On the other hand, the Third and First Armies required light. It was first settled that the Fifth Army should attack at 3.30 A.M. and the Third at 4.5. Sir Douglas Haig then decided that all the attacks should be simultaneous, and at his meeting with Generals Allenby and Gough before he set out for Paris he gave them instructions to this effect. It was then arranged that Zero hour for the whole operation should be 3.45 A.M. This was, as regards the First and Third Armies, an unfortunate, even a disastrous, decision. It appears that when at a conference the views of the

Third and Fifth Army commanders differed, General Allenby had the impression that he was at a disadvantage ; it seemed to him that the Commander-in-Chief was apt to misunderstand his points while appreciating those made by General Gough, who perhaps put his case better. In this instance, however, there was a compromise—little more to the liking of General Gough than of General Allenby—and one cannot see that it was necessary. The Third Army might well have attacked half an hour after the Fifth, in view of the fact that the two attacks would not come into contact until the Third had taken Fontaine and the Fifth had reached Hendecourt.

The subordinate commanders would not in any case have welcomed an assault in darkness, but if they had been given reasonable warning they could at least have made suitable arrangements, such as placing in front of the German wire boards with phosphorescent paint on the side facing the British lines, making a special point of the taking of compass bearings, perhaps fixing a series of short objectives to be gained by units "leap-frogging" each other. None of these precautions were possible because warning of the change in the hour did not reach even brigade commanders until the afternoon of the 2nd May, in some cases not until darkness was approaching. A night attack was therefore carried out, based on dispositions suited to an attack at dawn. The sun did not rise till 5.22, and it was impossible to distinguish a line of men at a distance of fifty yards until 4.5 A.M.—the original Third Army Zero.¹

Nor was this all. The moon, approaching the full, set 16 minutes before the new Zero hour. On large stretches of the front the troops assembling for the assault were silhouetted against its light as it sank behind them, their appearance giving warning of the attack and drawing heavy fire, which caused serious loss and confusion. That British troops, with their tradition of skill in estimating the effect of the lights of the heavens and turning it to their own advantage, should have been suffered to fall into this trap is one of the most melancholy features of a melancholy episode : a striking contrast to the attack of the 14th July 1916, where, on favourable ground and after the most careful preparations, success was achieved. A surprise assault in darkness may have good prospects of success ;

¹ The hours of sunrise and moon-setting have been furnished by the Astronomer Royal, subtracting 11 minutes for the longitude of Arras.

an assault in darkness which is expected by the enemy cannot. From report after report comes the same verdict : various handicaps are mentioned, but the early hour of the assault is almost invariably stated to have been the worst. A representative comment is that of the 10/Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders, 9th Division : " Everyone " was confident of success ; the men very fit and fresh ; " and in our opinion we could have gained our objectives " if the fatal mistake of fixing Zero 25 minutes before dawn " had not been made ". The Canadians alone, on the left of the First Army's attack, reported that darkness was an advantage. Even though the Australian assault at Bullecourt fell very far short of full success, it is perhaps significant that the darkness, which hindered almost all the British formations, was put to fairly good use by the overseas troops on their flanks.

OPERATIONS OF THE THIRD ARMY

Since the Bullecourt operations are officially ranked as a separate battle and lasted a fortnight, whereas the fighting on the Third and First Army fronts was over in 24 hours, it is convenient to describe the latter first, leaving the record of the Fifth Army to another chapter.

The attack of the Third Army was preceded on the 30th April by an all-night bombardment with lethal and lacrymatory gas shell and on the 1st May by intense heavy artillery bombardments of the villages in German hands. On the latter date the 12-inch gun, firing from the Triangle at a range of over ten miles, set Corbehem Station on fire.¹

The right and centre divisions of Lieut.-General Snow's VII. Corps were comparatively fresh. The 21st had been out of the line for ten days, and its principal task was allotted to a brigade, the 110th, which had not yet taken part in an attack. The 18th Division had been over a month in G.H.Q. reserve. The 14th Division, however, had been in line since the 25th April and, like the 21st, had had hard fighting in the first stage of the battle.

The plan of attack was strongly influenced by that of the Fifth Army on the right. The latter was to advance in a northerly direction, while the right of the VII. Corps advanced south-east. The Fifth Army, attacking the Hindenburg Line on a frontage of 4,000 yards of which

¹ On 14th April (see p. 298) the enemy had been obliged to draw back his ammunition railhead in this sector from Vitry to Corbehem.

Bullecourt formed the centre, was to capture Riencourt and Hendecourt. The first objective of the VII. Corps was the Sensée stream from the point where the Hindenburg Line crossed it to the south-east corner of Fontaine Wood, through the cross-roads half a mile south-east of Chérisy, and thence north to the Cojeul south of St. Rohart Factory. The second objective concerned only the 21st Division on the right, which was to cross the Sensée and capture the Hindenburg Line for 500 yards and the village of Fontaine. The third objective, to be captured by the 18th and 14th Divisions, was approximately half a mile beyond the second, with which, however, it corresponded on the extreme left. Meanwhile the corridor between the Fifth Army's left flank on the final objective and the position reached by the 21st Division after the capture of Fontaine—a corridor a mile wide—was to be kept under bombardment until 2 hours 40 minutes after Zero and then cleared by the 21st Division and its attached tanks. Since the infantry's task varied according to the obstacles which it had to face, the creeping barrage was to move very fast—100 yards in two minutes—over open ground, and very slowly—100 yards in six minutes—through woods, villages and strongly fortified areas.

In the 21st Division (Major-General D. G. M. Campbell) the 64th Brigade was to advance down the Hindenburg Line to the final objective beyond the Sensée. The 62nd Brigade on its right had merely to keep pace with it and occupy the ground south-west of the Hindenburg Line. The brunt of the action was to be borne by the 110th Brigade on the left, which had to advance to the Sensée, a distance of 1,400 yards, and then capture Fontaine beyond it. The field artillery support was provided by the division's own artillery, that of the 37th Division, and the CL. (Army) Brigade R.F.A. under the command of Br.-General R. A. C. Wellesley, C.R.A. of the 21st.¹ Most of the available tanks were allotted to the Fifth Army for the Bullecourt operation, but four—the only tanks in the Third Army—were placed at the disposal of the 21st Division. One was allotted to the 64th Brigade and two to the 110th, the fourth being held in divisional reserve.

¹ All the field and heavy artillery of the Army had been in action since the opening of the bombardment a month before and had been very highly tried. A certain amount of rest had, however, been given lately by withdrawing men in relays and occasionally the whole detachment of a brigade during a lull in the fighting, leaving the guns in position.

The 64th Brigade (Br.-General H. R. Headlam) made no considerable progress down the Hindenburg Line, either along the trenches—which were found to be filled with wire just behind the German blocks—or across the open. The commander of the 110th Brigade, Br.-General W. F. Hessey, had been directed, much against his will, to form up his leading battalions in a position which was not only cramped but also known to be covered by the German defensive barrage. He was forbidden to advance his starting-line because the 18th Division could not place its right flank further forward. When the attack began, the German barrage proved, owing to the British counter-battery fire, less heavy than had been feared; yet the anticipation of its falling had a bad moral effect on the infantry and led to a hurried start. The 8th and 9th Leicestershire both bore right-handed, shouldered off by troops of the 18th Division which did the same thing. The attack lost cohesion and disintegrated. For the most part it was held up in front of the trench covering Fontaine and Chérisy, which is best described by the German name of Chérisy-Riegel.¹ On the right about one hundred men of the 9/Leicestershire were reported to have passed through this line and reached the Croisilles—Chérisy road. Br.-General Hessey therefore ordered the 6/Leicestershire to attack Fontaine Wood in order to bring up his left and protect his advanced troops from counter-attack. Before this could be done, however, there was a counter-attack, which cut off all troops in advance of the Chérisy-Riegel and many who were in rear of it.

An attempt by the 7/Leicestershire at 7.15 P.M. to work down the sunken Héninel—Fontaine road and a trench parallel to it, in order to co-operate with a renewed attack by the 18th Division, made some progress. At 10 P.M., however, it was learnt that the 54th Brigade of that division had retired and that many of the 110th Brigade had fallen back with it. Br.-General Hessey had therefore no alternative but to order the scattered parties still lying out to reorganize behind the original position. The casualties of the division as a whole were light, but there were 388 missing in the 110th Brigade. Observers looking down into the valley had seen several large parties surrender to the enemy.

The three tanks of D Battalion had been unable to

¹ In the sector of the 21st Division it was known to the British as York Trench and in that of the 18th Division as Fontaine Trench.

render much assistance. One, in fact, did not find its bearings, and consequently did not come into action, until 40 minutes after Zero. It was eventually crippled by a broken track. Another, after being repeatedly holed by armour-piercing bullets, was stopped by radiator trouble. The commander of the third, seeing no infantry as he went forward, turned back, with unfortunate results, as will be shown. On again going forward, this tank became ditched.

The 18th Division (Major-General R. P. Lee) had the support of its own artillery, that of the 30th Division, and the CCLXXXI. Brigade of the 56th, under the command of Br.-General S. F. Metcalfe. The infantry was fresh, and it had a notable reputation for taking its objectives; but this time it had been given little opportunity to study the ground. The 54th Brigade (Br.-General C. Cunliffe-Owen) was bewildered by the darkness and disorganized by the returning tank just mentioned, which came back through its advancing waves. Someone, it is reported, shouted, "Retire!" whereupon the leading companies of the 7/Bedfordshire on the right and the right of the 12/Middlesex began to fall back. They were rallied and led forward again, but the barrage was now lost and they could not penetrate the Chérisy-Riegel, where there was much uncut wire. Meanwhile two companies of the Middlesex had forced their way through and reached the Sensée in touch with the 55th Brigade.

The 55th Brigade (Br.-General G. D. Price), despite confusion caused by the darkness, gained its first objective, which included Chérisy. At 5.45 A.M. the 7/Buffs and 8/East Surrey went forward to the final objective, and parties of both battalions reached it all along the front—a fine achievement. Unfortunately, before supports arrived on the scene all that had been gained was lost. The leading troops, fired at in flank and rear from dug-outs which had been overrun, fell back in face of a counter-attack, which was screened by the dense mist overhanging the valley. It was found impossible to rally them either on the Sensée or in the Cherisy-Riegel. By about 10.30 A.M. large numbers were back on their starting-line, though the greater part of the 7/Bedfordshire were lying out in front of the Chérisy-Riegel and parties of the 12/Middlesex and of the 55th Brigade were believed to be still in the village. A renewed attack was carried out by the reserve battalions of the two brigades, the 6/Northamptonshire and 7/Queen's,

primarily with a view to extricating these troops, at 7.15 P.M. This failed after some early progress, but in any case the survivors in Chérisy had surrendered long before.¹

The events on the front of the 14th Division (Major-General V. A. Couper) were almost a repetition of the misfortunes which befell the 18th. The attack was supported by the artillery of the 14th and 50th Divisions and the CCLXXX. Brigade of the 56th, under the orders of the division's own C.R.A., Br.-General E. Harding Newman. On the right the 8/Rifle Brigade and 8/K.R.R.C. of the 41st Brigade (Br.-General P. C. B. Skinner) easily captured the first objective. The 42nd Brigade (Br.-General F. A. Dudgeon) was, however, swept by enfilade machine-gun fire from beyond the Cojeul, and the 5/Oxford & Bucks L.I. and 9/Rifle Brigade, wheeling left to face it, became scattered in shell-holes and short lengths of trench. When the barrage lifted only the extreme right of the division, two companies of the 8/Rifle Brigade, went forward, to reach the final objective in touch with a few men of the 55th Brigade on the right, but with their left flank exposed to heavy machine-gun fire. The right wing of the counter-attack already mentioned drove them back, pursued by the enemy whom they masked from the fire of the troops on the first objective. On the withdrawal of the 18th Division being observed, all the attacking troops of the 14th began to follow its example. There were soon none in front of the trenches in which they had formed up except one small party of the 9/Rifle Brigade, which remained out all the following day.

The chief characteristics of the fighting on the VII. Corps front may be shortly summarized. They were: the confusion caused by the darkness; the speed with which the German artillery opened fire; the manner in which it concentrated upon the British infantry, almost neglecting the artillery; the intensity of its fire, the heaviest that many an experienced soldier had ever witnessed, seemingly unchecked by British counter-battery fire and lasting almost without slackening for fifteen hours; the readiness with which the German infantry yielded to the first assault and the energy of its counter-attack; and, it must be

¹ British reports speak of the counter-attack as coming up the valley from the direction of Vis en Artois. It is clear, however, from the German regimental accounts that it was mainly frontal, straight down the face of the steep bank of the Sensée opposite Chérisy, and carried out by only a few companies. These companies would certainly have been destroyed had the British musketry been good.

added, the bewilderment of the British infantry on finding itself in the open and its inability to withstand any resolute counter-attack.

In the VI. Corps Lieut.-General Haldane had under his command three divisions which had taken part in the first stage of the battle, the 56th, 3rd and 12th. The objective was a line east of St. Rohart Factory, the Bois du Sart and Pelves.

The 56th Division (Major-General C. P. A. Hull) was supported by the artillery of the 3rd and 15th Divisions and the CCXXXII. (Army) Brigade, under the command of its own C.R.A., Br.-General R. J. G. Elkington. Though no intermediate objective had been set by the VI. Corps, Major-General Hull had directed that a trench, known as Lanyard Trench, half-way between Cavalry Farm and St. Rohart Factory should be treated as one and consolidated when reached.

The 169th Brigade (Br.-General E. S. D'E. Coke) attacked with drive and determination. The 1/5th and 1/2nd London captured the first objective, and reached at least the nearest of the collection of factory buildings. The greater part of Cavalry Farm was captured by the 1/2nd London, but in one corner stubborn resistance was encountered. This corner was finally taken with 22 prisoners by bombers of the 1/9th London. The 167th Brigade (Br.-General G. H. B. Freeth) never had a chance. The German barrage fell almost precisely at Zero hour. The foremost German line, known as Tool Trench, lay just behind a crest. It had suffered little from British fire, and the garrison—contrary to the usual methods of defence at this period—stood shoulder to shoulder. Such a blast of fire burst from the trench that the attack was completely smashed, the few gallant parties who fought their way through being afterwards rounded up by the Germans. In this case darkness was a boon; for in daylight the 1/1st London and 1/7th Middlesex would have had few survivors. Both battalions fell back, and it appeared hopeless to renew the attack. In these circumstances, the 14th Division on the right having also failed, the position of the 169th Brigade was precarious, and a message was sent ordering the troops to withdraw that night. Confident of holding their own, the local commanders demanded confirmation of the order, and did not begin their unmolested retirement until 1.15 A.M. on the 4th May.

The 3rd Division had been back in the line for ten days, but Major-General Deverell had kept two brigades as fresh as he could, holding his front with the 76th. This brigade had had a hard time, the region of Monchy being perhaps the liveliest on the whole front, and 464 casualties had been suffered between the 24th April and the 1st May, when the 8th and 9th Brigades took over the line. The artillery consisted of that of the 12th and 29th Divisions with the CLV. (Army) Brigade, under the command of Br.-General J. Ollivant, C.R.A. of the 3rd Division. It had been arranged that the 12th Division on the left should not attack Pelves until Rœux was taken, but should in the first stage form a defensive flank to the 3rd Division. Meanwhile Pelves was to be bombarded by the 15-inch and 12-inch howitzers. The 6-inch guns were to keep Boiry and Vis en Artois under fire all day. The hostile shelling of Monchy had been so intense that it had been impossible to establish any permanent observation posts in the village.

The enemy obviously had foreknowledge of the attack ; for prior to its launch he deluged the front with chemical and high-explosive shell. At Zero, in fact, the field batteries were enveloped in thick clouds of gas. The detachments, wearing respirators, stuck manfully to their task. The infantry, however, was much disorganized. Most of the battalions also wore respirators during the assembly, and numbers of men who did not put them on, were overcome by vomiting. The 8th Brigade (Lieut.-Colonel A. F. Lumsden, 2/Royal Scots)¹ fell into confusion, largely owing to the fire of parties of the enemy who had been pushed forward into shell-holes and had thus avoided the British barrage. The waves of the 2/Royal Scots and 1/R. Scots Fusiliers becoming prematurely merged, the barrage was lost, and the attack broke down. The leading battalions of the 9th Brigade (Br.-General H. C. Potter), the 4/Royal Fusiliers and 13/King's, advanced gallantly to the first objective between the Bois des Aubépines and the Bois du Sart, but overran several machine guns hidden in the former. They beat off the first counter-attack launched against them ; but, since the 8th Brigade had failed and the 12th Division on their left had not captured a trench to their left rear, their position became impossible to maintain. A second and stronger counter-attack drove them

¹ The brigade commander, Br.-General H. G. Holmes, had been wounded on 30th April.

back with many men missing. Meanwhile, within a few minutes of Zero the local reserves on the whole divisional front had come under terrific artillery fire, which paralyzed all action on their part. Some notion of its intensity may be gathered from the fact that the reserve battalions of the 9th Brigade, the 12/West Yorkshire and 1/Northumberland Fusiliers, which did not go beyond the British front line, suffered 350 casualties between them.

The 12th Division (Major-General A. B. Scott) was supported by the artillery of the 17th and 33rd Divisions and the XLVIII. (Army) Brigade R.F.A., under the orders of Br.-General E. H. Willis, C.R.A. of the 12th. No. 3 Special Field Company R.E. was attached for the purpose of laying a smoke barrage with its 4-inch Stokes mortars along the Scarpe. As already mentioned, no attack was to be launched against Pelves until it was certain that Rœux was in British hands, and the division was to await news of its capture on the first objective, a line running north-westward from Keeling Copse.

This first objective was reached by the 6/Buffs and 7/E. Surrey of the 37th Brigade (Br.-General A. B. E. Cator). The battalions were, however, cut off by a counter-attack which worked in behind them, and only a handful made their way out. An attack after dark by the 6/R. West Kent completely failed. The 36th Brigade (Br.-General C. S. Owen), attacking with the 9th and 8th Royal Fusiliers, also took the first objective ; but again a counter-attack—this time with the bomb—drove it out. At 12.10 P.M. two companies of the 7/R. Sussex, after ten minutes' bombardment, retook the German front line, capturing 45 prisoners. No further advance was possible in daylight, but after dark the other two companies reached the first objective. Here they were consolidating when they were ordered back to the German front line, as the failure on the right had left their flank exposed. The ground captured by the 36th Brigade, representing an advance of five hundred yards on a front of a thousand, was actually the sole gain of the Third Army.¹

¹ After the successful counter-attack of the 7/R. Sussex, its bombers cleared the German dug-outs. In one of these Corporal G. Jarratt, 8/Royal Fusiliers, was a prisoner in the hands of the Germans. A bomb having been dropped in, he placed both feet upon it, confining the explosion, but having both his legs blown off. Wounded men in the dug-out who had also been captured by the Germans were safely removed, owing their lives to the heroic act of this man, who died before he could be brought in. He received the posthumous reward of the V.C.

The XVII. Corps was still faced by the familiar objectives of Rœux, the Chemical Works and Greenland Hill. Its attack was to be carried out by two divisions, the 4th and 9th, which had already had grim experience of this part of the front. Owing to the masses of ruined buildings in its path, no corps taking part in the attack was more heavily handicapped by the decision to attack before dawn, against which Lieut.-General Fergusson had protested as strongly as he could.

The Corps Heavy Artillery under the command of Br.-General N. G. Barron, consisted of the III., VII., XII., XVI., XXXIII., LV., LXVIII. and LXXVIII. Heavy Artillery Groups, with thirty-six 60-pdrs., fifty-six 6-inch howitzers, eight 6-inch guns, twenty 8-inch howitzers, twenty 9·2-inch howitzers, one 9·2-inch gun, six 12-inch howitzers, one 12-inch gun, and one 15-inch howitzer.¹ For the purpose of the artillery preparation on the 1st and 2nd May this artillery was divided into three groups, known as Counter-Battery, Trench (bombardment), and Super-Heavy.²

On the 1st May the bombardment was maintained from 5 A.M. onwards. Between that hour and 7.30 A.M. 240 rounds were fired by 8-inch and 9·2-inch howitzers on Rœux village, and 800 rounds on the enemy's advanced trenches and those on the slopes of Greenland Hill. At 7.30 A.M. fire was greatly intensified. Twelve batteries of 6-inch howitzers bombarded trenches and cut wire on Greenland Hill until 3 P.M., firing over 7,000 rounds. Simultaneously Rœux village and Hausa and Delbar Woods

¹ It is impossible to reproduce in detail all the heavy artillery schemes in a series of operations such as the Battles of Arras. That of the XVII. Corps on this occasion is given as a specimen.

² Counter-Battery Group :—VII. H.A.G. (two 60-pdr., two 6-inch howitzer, one 8-inch howitzer, and one 9·2-inch howitzer batteries) ; XII. H.A.G. (two 60-pdr., two 6-inch howitzer, and two 9·2-inch howitzer batteries) ; LXVIII. H.A.G. (two 60-pdr., two 6-inch howitzer, and two 8-inch howitzer batteries).

Trench Group :—H.Q. of LVI. H.A.G. (without batteries) ; III. H.A.G. (two 6-inch howitzer and one 8-inch howitzer batteries) ; XXXIII. H.A.G. (three 6-inch howitzer, one 8-inch howitzer, and one 9·2-inch howitzer batteries) ; LXXVIII. H.A.G. (three 6-inch howitzer and one 9·2-inch howitzer batteries).

Super-Heavy Group :—XVI. H.A.G. (two 6-inch gun batteries and one 9·2-inch gun) ; LV. H.A.G. (six 12-inch, and one 15-inch howitzers).

For the attack on the 3rd May these dispositions were altered. The 60-pdr. batteries were, with one exception, diverted to other tasks, and the Counter-Battery Group thus depleted consisted of one 60-pdr., six 6-inch howitzer, two 6-inch gun, three 8-inch howitzer, and three 9·2-inch howitzer batteries, with one 12-inch howitzer.

were bombarded at the rate of a round per gun per five minutes by one 9.2-inch and one 8-inch howitzer battery, and the big 15-inch howitzer fired 30 rounds on the same targets as well as on Plouvain. The 7.30 A.M. to 3 P.M. programme was more or less repeated from 3 to 7 P.M. Superimposed upon this was a series of four ten-minute hurricane bombardments of Biache, Boiry Notre Dame, Plouvain and Vis en Artois, all the 6-inch, 8-inch, and 9.2-inch howitzers that could bear taking part at the rate of a round per gun per minute and then returning to their regular tasks. Throughout the night five 6-inch howitzer batteries fired salvoes at irregular intervals on points such as trench junctions, while three 60-pdr. batteries attempted by similar measures to keep open the wire which had been cut. The programme on the 2nd May was somewhat similar, and in this case the battery salvoes were continued up to Zero on the 3rd. A 6-inch howitzer barrage creeping by fifty-yard lifts through Rœux Wood was also practised. On both days the infantry was temporarily withdrawn in order to permit heavy howitzer fire being directed on the Chemical Works, the Cemetery and buildings close to the front line, and even upon the German trenches west of the Rœux—Gavrelle road. It would seem, however, that the volume of fire on these objectives was inadequate by comparison with that directed against more distant targets.

The chief features of the heavy artillery action on the 3rd May in support of the attack were—apart from the counter-battery fire—searching for probable machine guns 300 yards in advance of the infantry and barraging of roads by the 60-pdrs.; trench bombardment 400 yards ahead of the infantry by certain 6-inch howitzers, and a regular creeping barrage keeping ahead of that of the field artillery, moving at the rate of 100 yards in two minutes by others; a similar creeping barrage of 8-inch and 9.2-inch howitzers; fire on roads and approaches by several calibres; and bombardment of the east end of Rœux, and of Plouvain, Biache, and Hausa and Delbar Woods by 9.2-inch and 15-inch howitzers. Safety limits were fixed of the following distances from the infantry: 6-inch howitzers, 400 yards; 8-inch and 9.2-inch howitzers, 500 yards; 15-inch howitzers, 800 yards.¹

The 4th Division was supported by the artillery of

¹ The programme for the right (4th Division) front is given in Note I. at end of Chapter.

the 51st, its own XXIX. Brigade, the LI. Brigade of the 9th Division, and the XIV. (Army) Brigade R.H.A. and XXIII. (Army) Brigade R.F.A., under the command of Br.-General F. T. Ravenhill, 4th Division. Major-General Hon. W. Lambton would have preferred a deliberate operation with a very slow barrage, but the rate of progress had to conform to that of the rest of the attack. At Rœux itself, however, he was able to arrange for the assault to be carried out independently.

The 10th Brigade (Br.-General A. G. Pritchard¹) put three battalions in line: 1/Somerset L.I. (detached from the 11th Brigade), Household Battalion and 1/R. Irish Fusiliers. The Somerset, starting twenty minutes after the other two, was to capture Rœux in its own time. The 2/Seaforth Highlanders and 1/R. Warwickshire were to go through to the final objective, Delbar and Hausa Woods, a trench covering Plouvain, and Plouvain Station.

Once more the darkness caused hopeless confusion; even the Somersets, starting late, could see nothing as they passed through Rœux Wood. Part of the battalion reached the outskirts of the village, but was unable to hold its ground. On the front of the Household Battalion a German machine gun behind a wall held its fire till the line came level with it and then swept it in enfilade with devastating effect. A few men of this battalion and of the Irish Fusiliers reached the first objective, 500 yards east of the Rœux—Gavrelle road; a party of the first wave of the Seaforth was seen advancing towards the second objective; and troops of the Royal Warwickshire certainly reached the first; but in every case few returned to tell the tale.

The 12th Brigade (Br.-General A. Carton de Wiart) had a very difficult problem, because the railway—partly embanked and partly in a cutting—ran diagonally across its zone of attack. The first objective, just beyond the Rœux—Gavrelle road, was assigned to the 2/Lancashire Fusiliers on the right and the 2/Essex on the left. The Essex were subsequently to form a flank along the railway, while the 2/Duke of Wellington's came up on the right of the Lancashire Fusiliers and with them attacked the second objective. The final, the trench covering Plouvain, was

¹ Br.-General C. Gosling, commanding at the opening of the battle, was killed on 12th April. At least four brigade commanders in the Third Army had become casualties in the course of the battle, though two of them had been only slightly wounded and a third slightly gassed. The loss in battalion commanders had been exceptionally heavy.

to be taken by the 2/Duke's and 1/King's Own. Good progress was made south of the railway. In fact, one wounded man came back to report that he and his party had reached a position whence they looked down into a "big village"—obviously Plouvain. North of the railway, however, the attack was held up much more quickly, and the enemy, working his way down the cutting, took the advanced troops on the south side in rear. The survivors fell back to the first objective, where there were now about one hundred men of four battalions without officers. Here they were heavily counter-attacked about 2 P.M. After the fall of darkness such of them as had not been rounded up by the enemy made their way back to the British lines. The 1/Rifle Brigade of the 11th Brigade was brought up to make a night assault on Rœux Château, but without success. The division, weak already, had suffered over 2,000 casualties, for no appreciable compensating advantage. The troops had displayed great gallantry in the assault, but the atmosphere of uncertainty resulting from the change in the programme was not without its effect upon them. All troops are sensitive to such factors in an operation, and it is probable that this, coupled with heavy loss among officers, undermined the infantry's power of resistance to counter-attack.

The 9th Division (Major-General H. T. Lukin) had available only two brigades, the South African Brigade being so weak for want of reinforcements that it was left behind when the division returned to the front.¹ The 52nd Brigade, 17th Division, was therefore put at Major-General Lukin's disposal as a reserve. The artillery consisted of that of the 34th Division, the XXXII. Brigade (4th Division), L. Brigade (9th Division), and LII. (Army) Brigade, under the command of Br.-General H. H. Tudor, C.R.A. of the 9th Division.

If possible, the darkness caused mishaps even worse here than elsewhere. In the 26th Brigade (Br.-General J. Kennedy) the 5/Cameron Highlanders edged right and became intermingled with the 2/Essex, 4th Division, whose

¹ As a further commentary on the employment of untrained drafts mentioned on p. 414, it may be noted that the 8/Black Watch of the 9th Division received on 28rd April, and was directed to take into action, a draft of 97 men, chiefly transfers from the Army Service Corps. The commanding officer, Colonel Sir G. W. Abercromby, Bt., states that these men, hastily put into kilts, had undergone no infantry training, that some could not fix bayonets, and some could not load their rifles, when they arrived.

troops in several cases fired on it. Two companies of the 10/Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders, in support, kept straight on and filled the gap ; but, thinking the Camerons were still in front, came unexpectedly into contact with the enemy and suffered very heavy loss. On the left the second wave of the 8/Black Watch was charged by the 9/Scottish Rifles of the 27th Brigade (Br.-General F. A. Maxwell), a portion of which wheeled right-handed so far that many men mistook the British front line for the German and advanced upon it, firing from the hip. Both this battalion and the 6/K.O.S.B., however, made considerable progress, but the survivors were cut off by Germans who had either been overrun or had worked in behind them. Br.-General Maxwell ordered two companies of the 12/Royal Scots from reserve to attack the German front line on the left at 8 P.M., mainly with the object of extricating the troops which had gone on beyond it. In this, though no ground was permanently gained, he had a measure of success, many men making their way back under cover of the darkness. The action was nevertheless a disaster pure and simple for the 6/K.O.S.B., which suffered over four hundred casualties and was practically destroyed.

OPERATIONS OF THE FIRST ARMY

On the First Army front the ground operations were preceded by an attack from the air on the German observation balloons, carried out by Nieuports of the Tenth Wing R.F.C. (Lieut.-Colonel W. R. Freeman). Flying across the lines at a height of fifty feet, in order to effect surprise, and covered by an artillery barrage, six British machines caught eight balloons in the air, destroyed four of them, damaged the remainder, and returned without loss through a hail of fire. During the fine, bright weather many fruitful bombing operations had been carried out. A remarkable change came over the struggle in the air from about the 1st May. The pilots of the British fighting squadrons, who had endured with unbroken spirit the adverse conditions of April, had gained experience in handling their newly-acquired up-to-date aircraft. Casualties now dropped ; many more German machines were shot down ; and the hostile formations were pushed back, so that fighting took place mostly in the German rear areas.¹

The XIII. Corps attacked with two divisions on a front

¹ "The War in the Air", Vol. III., pp. 368-72.

from the southern outskirts of Gavrelle to the southern corner of the wood south of Fresnoy. Whereas, however, the 31st Division was fresh, after a considerable spell in First Army reserve, the infantry of the 2nd Division had been reduced to a shadow of its former self. Lieut.-General Congreve had therefore ordered the 31st, in addition to relieving the 63rd Division at Gavrelle, to take over the right half of the 2nd Division's front. The 31st then held about 3,500 yards to the 2nd's 1,100. The operation to be carried out was complicated by the fact that for about 750 yards the enemy still held the Oppy line west of Oppy Wood.

The 31st Division (Major-General R. Wanless O'Gowan) had a most difficult task, especially on its left, where Oppy Wood, with its many felled trees and interlaced branches, formed an abattis. Moreover, owing to the nature of the ground, all the field artillery was firing at unusually long ranges. As its front was a long one it had the support of nine field artillery brigades, namely, the artillery of the 2nd and 63rd Divisions, its own CLXV. Brigade, and the XXXIV., LXIV., LXXXVI. and CCCXI. (Army) Brigades R.F.A., commanded by its own C.R.A., Br.-General E. P. Lambert. For the same reason its machine-gun companies were reinforced by 16 Vickers guns of the 63rd Division and eight Hotchkiss of the 1/1st Northumberland Hussars, the XIII. Corps Cavalry.

The infantry was certainly observed by the enemy as it formed up, and in this division the light of the setting moon proved even more disastrous than the early hour at which the assault was launched. Despite the heavy fire with which they were met, the 15th, 18th and 16th West Yorkshire of the 98rd Brigade (Br.-General J. D. Ingles) all made good progress at first, some companies reaching the final objective. The failure of the 92nd Brigade on the left, however, and strong counter-attacks on this flank drove the three battalions back. The enemy even seized the Gavrelle Windmill, but this was recaptured by the gallant and skilful counter-attack of a company of the 18/Durham L.I. under the command of 2nd Lieutenant H. E. Hitchin.

The 92nd Brigade (Br.-General O. de L. Williams) likewise attacked with three battalions in line, 11th, 12th and 13th East Yorkshire. The tremendous barrage laid by the enemy on the assembly positions prior to Zero caused serious disorganization, and in the darkness—here increased by

the black mass of Oppy Wood in front—the troops could not see when the barrage lifted. The right battalion failed completely ; ¹ parties of the centre and left entered Oppy Wood in the darkness, but were either captured or driven out. The division suffered about 1,900 casualties.

The 2nd Division (Major-General C. E. Pereira) was so weak that a composite brigade was formed for this operation. This consisted of four battalions, "A" from the 5th Brigade, "B" from the 6th, "C" and "D" from the 99th, under the command of Br.-General R. O. Kellett, 99th Brigade. Its strength was about 1,800 rifles. The first objective was the rearward line of the "Arleux Loop" from the wood south of Fresnoy southwards; the second, the Fresnoy—Oppy road. "B" Battalion attacked on the right and "C" on the left, with "D" moving in close support. The field artillery consisted of the CLX. Brigade (81st Division) and the LXXXIV. and CCCXV. (Army) Brigades, under the orders of Br.-General G. H. Sanders, C.R.A. of the 2nd Division.

The composite brigade was heavily shelled as it made its way to its position of assembly. The infantry suffered considerable loss and was delayed by fire on crowded communication trenches. In some cases companies had not reached their exact stations by Zero hour, but the majority of the troops began their advance punctually. Only the left of "B" Battalion made any progress, and it was driven back by a strong counter-attack from Oppy. "C" Battalion, in touch with the Canadians, reached its final objective on the left and on the right captured the trench which constituted its first. The counter-attack from Oppy was checked by fire, but the enemy, after driving out "B" Battalion, entered the trench and bombed his way northward. The situation was for a time highly critical and Major-General Pereira was in dread lest the flank of the Canadian Corps, which had captured Fresnoy, should be left uncovered. However, with the aid of its reserves and of the Canadians, the Composite Brigade formed a block 400 yards south of the left divisional boundary, and posts were established in touch with the Canadian flank at the road-fork south-east of Fresnoy. The division, weary and depleted as it was, had at least contrived to give some

¹ 2nd Lieut. J. Harrison, 11/East Yorkshire, who was reported missing, believed killed, was awarded the V.C. for repeated attempts to force his way through, in one of which he was seen to hurl himself single-handed against a German machine gun which was holding up the advance.

support to the hold of the Canadians on that village, and this had been its chief function. It had also captured 138 prisoners. But it had been subjected to treatment such as only a desperate emergency could have justified ; for the employment of practically all the surviving infantry in this manner bled the division white.

On the front of the Canadian Corps the attack was carried out by the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions, each employing one brigade for the purpose. The final objective was the support trench of the Oppy-Méricourt line, and included Fresnoy Wood, the village and the park. The field artillery support consisted, for the 1st Canadian Division, of its own two brigades, the XXVI. and LXXII. (Army) Brigades R.F.A., and A Battery, V. Brigade R.H.A., commanded by Br.-General H. C. Thacker ; and for the 2nd Canadian Division of the four brigades of its own and the 5th Canadian Division artillery, with the XXVIII. (Army) Brigade R.F.A., commanded by Br.-General H. H. Panet.

The Germans, who were expecting an attack, shelled the jumping-off trenches at intervals throughout the night, making the assembly difficult and inflicting a number of casualties. They did not, however, expect to be assaulted before daylight, and undoubtedly in this sector the surprise of a night attack proved an advantage. Nevertheless, within a minute of Zero the German batteries laid a barrage in No Man's Land which caused losses to the rear waves of the attacking battalions.

On the right, the 1st Canadian Brigade (Br.-General W. A. Griesbach) assaulted with three battalions on a frontage of 1,400 yards. The gaps cut by the artillery in the wire were hard to find in the darkness, but, on the other hand, the darkness rendered the German musketry comparatively ineffective. The 3rd (Toronto) Battalion overran all resistance in Fresnoy Wood, where 75 Germans in dug-outs surrendered. Soon after 5 A.M., shortly before sunrise, it captured the support trench, known to the Germans as the "Fresnoy-Riegel", 500 yards beyond the wood. The 2nd (Eastern Ontario) Battalion made equally fine progress. The opposition in the front trench was quickly smothered, and three machine guns in the western ruins of Fresnoy were cleverly outflanked and put out of action by detachments from the leading wave of the attack. The advance was thus able to proceed at once through the village, where little further resistance was met. The

final objective, 250 yards beyond, was reached soon after 4.30 A.M., over 220 Germans surrendering to the battalion. The zone of attack of the 1st (Western Ontario) Battalion lay astride the Lille road, which formed the northern boundary of Fresnoy park. The battalion's left, north of the road, reached its final objective, the support trench, after an advance of 1,400 yards, by 4.50 A.M. The right company had more trouble in working through the park, but reached its objective by 5.40 A.M.

The 6th Brigade (Br.-General H. D. B. Ketchen), assaulting on a frontage of 900 yards, had a less straightforward task, as it was to form a strong left flank protection facing north-east. With this object in view, it was to capture the network of trenches at the junction of the old Arleux Loop with the main Oppy—Méricourt line. To add to their difficulties, the assaulting battalions were enfiladed at the start by well-directed fire from German batteries near Avion, a feature of the German defensive barrage scheme. The resulting confusion was increased by the fact that the German wire had not been so well cut in this sector and, owing to the consequent delay, touch was lost with the creeping barrage.

Despite these handicaps, the 27th (City of Winnipeg) Battalion, after crossing 500 yards of open ground, succeeded in capturing the greater part, about four hundred yards, of the front trench alongside the Fresnoy—Acheville road after a sharp fight at close quarters.¹ Its final objective, the support trench two hundred yards beyond, was reached soon after sunrise. The remaining two hundred yards of the objective was not taken. The captured trench was blocked at its northern end, and measures were taken by the left company to gain touch with the battalion on its left that had failed to get forward. The problem that faced the 81st (Alberta) Battalion, on the left, was further complicated by the presence about three hundred yards ahead, half-way to the German front line, of a recently dug trench, unoccupied but protected by almost intact wire. On reaching this obstacle its advancing lines were swept by enfilade fire from the trench junction on its northern flank, and the wire prevented change of direction to face it. As a result, the attack split up: some groups followed the new German trench northwards, which led

¹ Lieutenant R. G. Combe was awarded the V.C. posthumously for this action. The Gazette stated that "it was entirely due to his magnificent courage that the position was carried, secured, and held".

them into the old Arleux Loop trench, where machine-gun fire from the trench junction caused heavy losses and stopped further movement; others reached the German front trench, but were so isolated that they were unable to make it good. As soon as the failure was evident the senior officer present ordered the occupation of the new German trench as a front line, and established a block in the Arleux Loop trench where the new trench joined it. At the same time touch was gained with the 27th Battalion on the right and a new connecting trench dug. Further attempts to bomb along the Arleux Loop towards the trench junction failed.

About 10.30 A.M. Germans were seen on the ridge 800 yards ahead of the captured line in front of Fresnoy village preparing for a counter-attack,¹ and soon afterwards they began the advance in open order. The Canadians were ready, and their machine-gun and rifle fire, supported by an artillery barrage, inflicted heavy losses and broke up the attack, only a small party reaching a bank two hundred yards in front of the Canadian line. Another counter-attack delivered during the afternoon suffered a similar fate.²

The capture of Fresnoy was the culminating point of the series of brilliant successes by the Canadian Corps during the Arras battles, and the relieving feature of a day which many who witnessed it consider the blackest of the War. The corps casualty list was comparatively high, 64 officers and 1,410 other ranks; but, on the other hand, 12 officers and 479 other ranks were captured from the enemy.

One of the factors in this isolated success was un-

¹ The reserve battalions of the *16th Reserve* and *25th Reserve* were sent forward to the Rouvroy—Fresnes line, thence to counter-attack and recapture Fresnoy village.

² On hearing of the failure of the first counter-attack, the commander of the *15th Reserve Division* ordered another effort to be made, in which both the counter-attack division in this sector, the *185th*, and the *4th Guard Division* on the left were asked to assist. Of the former, one battalion was sent forward from Izél, but neither it nor the troops that had already failed in the morning could make headway against the artillery, machine-gun and rifle fire encountered. Of the *4th Guard Division*, the support battalion of its left regiment, the *5th Guard Grenadier*, was ordered to co-operate, but, owing to delays in transmission of orders, it was 2.15 P.M. before it advanced from about Chez Bontemps. By 4.30 P.M. this isolated attack across the rising ground south-east of Acheville had been brought to a standstill about five hundred yards from the new Canadian line, whilst a simultaneous bombing attack from the trench junction towards Fresnoy Park failed to break through the block held by the 27th Canadian Battalion.

doubtedly the high standard of the Canadian infantry reinforcements. It has been pointed out that British divisions which began a long-drawn-out battle in a high state of efficiency suffered a very serious falling-off as the ranks of their battalions became filled with inadequately trained drafts.¹ The Canadian drafts had not only as a rule undergone more training but were also rather older men and often of better physique. Thus a Canadian division appeared to deteriorate very little after taking part in several engagements at short intervals of time. The same applied to a great extent to the Australian and New Zealand troops, though the Australians, who maintained in the field more formations than the Canadians, from a smaller though more homogeneous population, were at a disadvantage by comparison with them.

The Oppy—Méricourt line was found to be extremely strong, at least at this point, and the work the Germans had done on it had been dictated by the commanding position of Fresnoy. As the history of one of the German regiments destined to take part in the big counter-attack of the 8th May puts it, “a stone had been knocked out of the German defensive wall which had to be replaced without delay if the whole neighbouring position to north and south were not to be gravely threatened”.

NOTE I

HEAVY ARTILLERY ACTION ON FRONT OF 4TH DIVISION, XVII.
CORPS, 3RD MAY 1917

Targets can be indicated only approximately without the use of co-ordinates or of the names of trenches not marked on the maps belonging to the volume.

<i>Time</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Batteries</i>	<i>Task</i>	<i>Rounds</i>
Z to Z + 55'	LXVIII.	1 60-pdr. 1 60-pdr.	Trenches and likely machine guns, 500 yds. ahead of infantry. Road in Scarpe valley south of Delbar Wood. ²	Round a gun per 2 mins.

¹ See p. 414.

² In view of what happened in the valley (see p. 444) it is obvious that this fire, which was intended to check the movement of reinforcements, ceased much too soon. Probably it also began needlessly early.

<i>Time</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Batteries</i>	<i>Task</i>	<i>Rounds</i>
Z + 55' till further orders	LXVIII.	2 60-pdr.	Ground from railway to Scarpe halfway between Biache and Plouvain, especially towpath of Scarpe.	} Round a gun per 3 mins.
Z till further orders	III.	1 6-in. how.	Walk up railway 400 yards ahead of infantry to north of Plouvain.	} Round a gun per 3 mins.
Z to Z + 20'	III.	1 6-in. how.	Bombard zone from S.E. of Cemetery, through centre of Rœux, to Scarpe	} Round a gun per 2 mins.
Z to Z + 12'	LXXVIII. XXXIII.	3 6-in. how. 2 6-in. how.	Barrage starts from centre of Rœux to N.E. of Chemical Works, and creeps 600 yards at rate of 100 yards in 2 mins.	} Round a gun per 2 mins.
Z + 12' to Z + 49'	LXXVIII. XXXIII.	3 6-in. how. 2 6-in. how.	Hausa and Delbar Woods, trenches W. and N. of them, and defences of Plouvain	} Round a gun per 3 mins.
Z + 20' to Z + 91'	III.	1 6-in. how.	Road from Plouvain E. of Delbar Wood to Scarpe	} Round a gun per 3 mins.
Z + 49' to Z + 91'	LXXVIII. XXXIII.	3 6-in. how. 2 6-in. how.	Road as above and defences of Plouvain	} Round a gun per 3 mins.
Z + 91' to Z + 106'	III. XXXIII. LXXVIII.	1 6-in. how. 2 6-in. how. 3 6-in. how.	Eastern part of Plouvain	} Round a gun per 3 mins.
Z + 106' till further orders	III. XXXIII.	1 6-in. how. 2 6-in. how.	Biache Station and sidings, railway junction W. Biache, W. edge of Biache	} Round a gun per 3 mins.
Z to Z + 12'	XXXIII. III. LXXVIII.	1 8-in. how. 1 8-in. how. 1 9·2-in. how.	Barrage starts from centre of Rœux to E. of Cemetery, and creeps, converging to S., so as to reach E. end of Rœux at Z + 12 mins.	} Round a gun per 2 mins.
Z to Z + 30'	XXXIII.	1 9·2-in. how.	Brickworks 800 yds. N. of Plouvain	} 20

<i>Time</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Batteries</i>	<i>Task</i>	<i>Rounds</i>
Z + 30' to Z + 91'	XXXIII.	1 9·2-in. how.	Plouvain	} Round a gun per 5 mins.
Z + 12' to Z + 91'	LXXVIII.	1 9·2-in. how.	Plouvain	
Z + 91' till further orders	XXXIII. LXXVIII.	1 9·2-in. how. 1 9·2-in. how.	Biache	
Z	LV.	1 15-in. how.	E. end of Rœux	1
Z to Z + 90'	LV.	1 15-in. how.	Hausa and Delbar Woods and Plouvain	} 12

NOTE II

THE GERMANS IN THE THIRD BATTLE OF THE SCARPE

The German front in the Third Battle of the Scarpe was held by seven divisions. Whereas, of the eleven British divisions in the attack, only two, the 18th and 31st, could be described as fresh, the enemy was much more favourably situated in this respect. On the left, the *49th Reserve Division*, from the Sensée to south-east of Chérisy, was newly arrived from Flanders; the *199th*, from Chérisy to the Cojeul, had come up from the south; the *221st*, from the Cojeul to the Bois des Aubépines, had been engaged on the 23rd April; the *9th Reserve*, from thence to the Scarpe, had been in rest billets and had taken over the line only on the night of the 29th April; the *208th*, from the Scarpe to south-east of Gavrelle, had seen some hard fighting, but had been given a fresh regiment (*17th Bavarian Reserve*, *6th Bavarian Reserve Division*) to replace its exhausted *25th Regiment*; the *1st Guard Reserve*,¹ from south-east of Gavrelle to the Oppy—Bailleul road, had had all its regiments heavily engaged, and the *28th Reserve Regiment*, *185th Division*, which was attached to it and held its centre sector, had likewise suffered severely; the *15th Reserve Division*, from the Oppy—Bailleul road to halfway between Fresnoy and Acheville, was quite fresh.

There is no need to describe the operations in any detail from the German point of view, because the British failure was in general so complete, and the defence was able to repulse the attack or drive out troops which had broken into its positions without calling upon divisions in reserve. The impression left by the accounts in German regimental histories emphasizes the British infantry's lack of power of resistance when counter-attacked by quite small bodies of troops. The Germans frequently employed one or two companies only in such counter-attacks. Thus, between the Sensée and the Cojeul, on the fronts of the *49th Reserve* and *199th Divisions*, where the

¹ This was the only one of the original counter-attack divisions still engaged.

British had great initial success, it took only three platoons to retake Chérisy. The Germans made clever use of ground, but most of their counter-attacks would have been held by troops who could really use their rifles.

Some of the hardest fighting was immediately north of the Cojeul, where the British 169th Brigade of the 56th Division broke through the *41st Regiment, 221st Division*. Part of this attack swung northward across the Cambrai road, and took the front line further north in rear, but was, in its turn, mopped up by the German reserve battalion. The fate of the luckless 167th Brigade is described by the Germans almost exactly as in its own records. The front-line trench of the *60th Reserve Regiment (221st Division)* had escaped the bombardment, and the leading waves of the attack were annihilated, the Germans standing up in the open to fire into them. The *9th Reserve Division*, south of the Scarpe, was the only one that lost any ground permanently—to the British 36th Brigade—except on the right of the attack at Fresnoy.

North of the Scarpe, the British 4th Division broke through the front of the *185th Regiment* and *65th Reserve* of the *208th Division*. The regimental reserves, aided by the *25th Regiment*, in divisional reserve, restored the situation. The last-named regiment accomplished a wonderful feat. It had been, as already stated, relieved by the *17th Bavarian Reserve* as exhausted, and was now reorganized as one battalion. Counter-attacking up the Scarpe valley, with its left on the river, its right company came unexpectedly upon a body of British troops, from which it captured 150 prisoners and three machine guns. A second party of British was then encountered, from which, with the aid of a detachment of the *185th Regiment*, it took fifty more prisoners. Yet another party was then overrun, so that by the time it had re-entered Rœux and rescued a pioneer company still holding out there it had in its hands 358 prisoners. Its own losses are given as 117. It must be added, however, that this regiment had a casualty list of just under one thousand between the 28rd April and the 3rd May, and that several others suffered losses not very much lower.

Where the Germans lost most heavily was at Fresnoy, where numerous prisoners were taken and the immediate counter-attacks broke down. The *17th Reserve (15th Reserve Division)* reports 650 casualties. Those of the *25th Reserve*, which held Fresnoy village itself, must have been very much higher still, but they are not recorded.

[illegible]

Heights in metres.
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CHAPTER XVIII

THE BATTLE OF BULLECOURT, 3RD-17TH MAY 1917

(Map 8 ; Sketches 20, 21, 22)

PREPARATIONS FOR A RENEWED ATTACK

EVER since the failure at Bullecourt on the 11th April the Fifth Army had been preparing a renewed attack. There had, however, been repeated postponements. In the first place, the Australian troops, after their previous experience, distrusted the co-operation of tanks and now desired to act without them. A very thorough artillery preparation was therefore necessary. Then, General Gough did not desire to make another assault upon the formidable position until the Third Army had reached the line of the Sensée. Map 8.
Sketch
20.

After the operations of the 11th April the general situation and the motive for his intervention had altered. That morning it had appeared possible that the Third Army would break through, and that if the Fifth could penetrate the Hindenburg Line and fall upon the flank of the enemy a brilliant victory might be won in the open. Since then the Third Army's operations had been limited to step-by-step advances. Exploitation of the Third Army's success had been the object of the first attack on Bullecourt ; now the object was to aid the Third Army and endeavour to carry forward its right wing. The attack finally took place 18 days after the date first projected.¹

¹ The order for the operation was issued on 12th April, and stated that the attack would be launched on Sunday the 15th. (See p. 370.) The dates then successively given were "not before" the 16th, "not before" the 17th, "not before" the 18th, the 20th, the 22nd, "the 26th or 27th". There appears to be no record in the British archives of the further postponements, but the Australian historian (A.O.A., iv., p. 419) states that the date was afterwards given as "probably" the 28th, then "probably" 3rd May, and that on 30th April this last date was confirmed.

It is to be noted that by the time the Fifth Army did co-operate with the Third, on the 3rd May, Sir Douglas Haig had virtually decided to close down the Arras offensive and transfer his operations to Flanders.¹ The Battle of Bullecourt, therefore, like the operations of the Third and First Armies on the 3rd May, was mainly designed to hold the enemy to his ground, to assist the French, and to encourage them not to break off their own attacks. But an essential feature differentiated the Battle of Bullecourt from the Third Battle of the Scarpe: the latter was a failure everywhere except at Fresnoy, where no possibility of exploiting the success existed, whilst the former resulted in a small and precarious lodgement in the hostile fortifications, a lodgement which had either to be abandoned or extended. The Commander-in-Chief was not disposed to abandon it. So, whereas the Third Battle of the Scarpe ended in 24 hours and no further general action on this front took place, at Bullecourt a fierce and bloody struggle, in which on the British side from first to last six divisions were engaged upon a few acres of ground, raged for a full fortnight.

In the operations of the 11th April a single Australian division had assaulted the re-entrant in the Hindenburg Line between Quéant and Bullecourt, the plan being that four tanks should subsequently turn left-handed and penetrate Bullecourt, followed by an Australian battalion. No encouragement to repeat that method could be derived from the experience of the action. The I. Anzac Corps was to attack on much the same frontage as before, astride the "Central Road" which ran from Noreuil to Hendecourt, but now the V. Corps—extending its right about five hundred yards further east—was to attack Bullecourt simultaneously and also the Hindenburg Line to a distance of 1,500 yards north-west of the village. Each corps was employing one division in the attack, the V. Corps being supported by tanks and the I. Anzac operating without them.

The ground was without strongly-marked features, a succession of shallow valleys and low spurs running roughly from north-east to south-west. Bullecourt itself stood partly in a valley, partly on the eastern slope of a spur, so that the west side was thirty or forty feet higher than the east. The railway, partly embanked and partly in a cutting, provided good cover but limited the movement of the tanks.

¹ See p. 427.

The first objective of both corps was the Hindenburg support trench upon a front of about 4,000 yards; the second was the Fontaine—Quéant road, running nearly parallel to the front; the third consisted virtually of the villages of Rencourt (I. Anzac Corps) and Hendecourt (V. Corps), the line to be attained being shaped like the little end of an egg with the point north-west of Hendecourt. It was an objective not easy to attain—the “fanning-out” of troops to secure the flanks of a salient having proved in the past a very difficult operation to control—and practically impossible to hold unless the VII. Corps were successful in joining hands with the attackers.

The heavy artillery had been reinforced by six heavy and siege batteries from the First Army and one siege battery from the Third since the failure of the 11th April. The I. Anzac Corps had now 28, and the V. Corps 20 siege and heavy batteries, in addition to one 15-inch and two 12-inch howitzer batteries under Army headquarters, and were equipped on the scale usual for a major offensive.¹ This assemblage of heavy artillery and a proportional concentration of field necessitated the transport of large quantities of ammunition. By the end of April, however, hard work had greatly improved the communications across the tract of country laid waste by the Germans. There was now an ammunition issuing station at Frémicourt, east of Bapaume. Light railways radiating from this point to Vaux, Morchies, Beaumetz, and Vélú, with one from Achiet le Grand to Mory, facilitated the carriage of ammunition. With fine weather, work on the roads made good progress.² The troops were also speedily housed in fair comfort. Camps composed of the useful Nissen

¹ One heavy gun or howitzer to approximately twenty yards of frontage.

I. Anzac Corps (G.O.C.R.A., Br.-General W. J. Napier; C.H.A., Br.-General L. D. Fraser): II., IX., XIV., XXIII., XLIV. Heavy Artillery Groups, comprising nine 6-inch howitzer, four 8-inch howitzer, five 9·2-inch howitzer, one 12-inch howitzer, seven 60-pdr., and two 6-inch gun batteries.

V. Corps (G.O.C.R.A., Br.-General R. P. Benson; C.H.A., Br.-General T. R. C. Hudson): I., IV., XXV., XL., XLII., XLIII. Heavy Artillery Groups, comprising eight 6-inch howitzer, four 8-inch howitzer, four 9·2-inch howitzer, three 60-pdr., and one 6-inch gun batteries.

² The light railways were constructed and operated by the Anzac Light Railways detachment, independently of the Directorate of Light Railways—a branch of the Transportation Directorate—until the I. Anzac Corps was withdrawn. Similarly, the Chief Engineers, Br.-Generals A. C. Joly de Lotbinière (I. Anzac Corps) and A. J. Craven (V. Corps), were responsible for the road work. It was not until the battle was at an end that “Transportation” took over the roads to a line about three miles from the front.

huts¹ or of shacks constructed by the engineers dotted a countryside which had the appearance of primeval prairie. Even in the demolished villages rough-and-ready repairs made habitable many houses and barns. There was ample grazing for horses, which picked up condition again after their winter exertions in the mud of the Somme battlefield and the bad weather of the early spring.

As regards field artillery, the 2nd Australian Division, which was to carry out the attack on the front of the I. Anzac Corps, had at its disposal its own divisional artillery, that of the 1st and 4th Australian Divisions, and the XIV. Brigade A.F.A. from the 5th Division, all under the command of Br.-General G. J. Johnston, C.R.A. of the 2nd. The 62nd Division of the V. Corps had an even greater concentration: its own artillery, that of the 7th, 11th, and 58th Divisions, and the XVI. Brigade R.H.A. of the 4th Cavalry Division, less one battery, under the command of Br.-General A. T. Anderson, C.R.A. of the 62nd.²

From the 12th April onwards the artillery was engaged, with increasing violence as new batteries moved up, in bombardment, counter-battery fire, wire-cutting, and raking of the German approaches by night. The last remaining houses of Bullecourt were demolished, though many walls still stood a few feet high, while the big cellars, on top of which the rubble acted as a bursting-course, were by no means all destroyed. Both walls and cellars were to play an important part in the battle.

The engineers were fully occupied with tasks other than those already mentioned. The construction of dug-outs for headquarters and telephone exchanges, and the provision of water-supply were also required of them, while the alarming experience of the German attack on Lagnicourt led to a hastening of work on the British defences.

In striking contrast to the first attack, delivered at very short notice, the second was the subject of careful preparation. Orders and instructions went into minute detail, and the infantry practised the attack on ground marked out to represent the enemy's entrenchments.

The front of the I. Anzac Corps still extended to the Canal du Nord, but in the right sector the 1st Australian

¹ See "1916", Vol. II. p. 540.

² The scale of 13-pdrs., 18-pdrs., and 4·5-inch howitzers was one piece to approximately eleven yards.

Division had been relieved by the 11th Division. This was preparatory to giving all the Australian troops—less the 3rd Division, which was up in Flanders—a simultaneous rest after a hard winter. The 2nd Australian Division had taken over the brigade sector at Lagnicourt, to hold which the 2nd Australian Brigade (1st Division) had been put at its disposal. The 1st Australian Division, less artillery and the 2nd Brigade, formed the corps reserve, south of Bapaume. The 5th lay east of Albert and the 4th was resting still further in rear. The front of the V. Corps, from a point south of the south-east corner of Bullecourt to the Sensée, was held by the 62nd Division, with two battalions detached from the 7th on its left flank between the Ecoust—Fontaine road and the stream. The 7th and 58th Divisions lay north-west of Bapaume.

THE OPERATIONS OF THE 3RD MAY

The 2nd Australian Division (Major-General N. M. Smyth) was to attack at 3.45 A.M. with two brigades, 5th on the right and 6th on the left. The creeping barrage was to move at the rate of 100 yards in three minutes in the first instance, slowing down later to that of 100 yards in five minutes. Machine guns were to be employed on an exceptionally large scale, two companies borrowed from the 5th Australian Division making a total of 96 guns. With the exception of six guns which were to go forward with each brigade and a few held in reserve or employed as anti-aircraft protection, all these guns were to provide overhead or flanking barrage fire. Twelve Stokes mortars were to advance with the infantry. The attacking waves in any case ran a considerable risk of being raked by enfilade fire, and in order that their flanks should not actually brush past the wire at Bullecourt and Quéant on either side of the re-entrant, the frontage was made narrower than the objective in the Hindenburg Line. The portions of the objective not directly attacked were to be gained subsequently by bombing outwards along the trenches. As regards the right flank, this was a matter of small importance. Not so on the left, however, where a stretch of 300 yards of both Hindenburg trenches between the flanks of the I. Anzac and V. Corps was in the first instance not attacked frontally and not even kept under artillery fire.

On the right the attack of the 5th Brigade (Br.-General

R. Smith) collapsed. Some bunching occurred in the darkness, and while the troops were halted in front of the almost demolished German wire an intense cross-fire from machine guns swept the ground ahead of them. Some pushed on ; others hesitated to face the fire ; there was confusion and wavering. Then, as happened at the same time on the front of the VII. Corps,¹ someone lost his head and gave the order to retire, and the troops came pouring back to the sunken Bullecourt—Quéant road.

Meanwhile the 6th Brigade (Br.-General J. Gellibrand), finding the wire well cut, entered the first Hindenburg trench, though the left of the 22nd Battalion, under close enfilade fire from Bullecourt, failed and fell back at 4.30 A.M. At 4.18 A.M. the second trench was carried by the 24th Battalion on the right and by the right company of the 22nd on the left.

The full extent of the débâcle on the right brigade front did not become generally apparent for some little time. The 5th Brigade's special rocket signal announcing the capture of the first-line trench had been fired at 4.5 A.M. by a party which had entered on the extreme left ; at 4.27 there was a report that the second line had also been reached. Br.-General Smith learnt just afterwards that men were coming back, and gave instructions for them to be rallied and led forward again ; but he did not realize that his attack was a complete failure. Even the troops of the 6th Brigade, who were in touch on their right with some fractions of the 17th Battalion, the left of the 5th Brigade, were at first unaware that these fractions were all that had made their way in.

To Br.-General Gellibrand, who had established his command post on the railway, the situation was, however, quite clear, and now with regard to his right flank, as later with regard to his left, he was able to discount the over-optimistic reports which came to him from the rear. At 4.57 A.M. he informed divisional headquarters that three battalions of the 5th Brigade were falling back. He sent Captain W. R. Gilchrist, 6th Field Company, who was attached to his staff, to rally the troops in the sunken road. As the 5th Brigade headquarters insisted that their troops held their objective, Br.-General Gellibrand obtained Major-General Smyth's permission to employ a company of the 26th Battalion (7th Brigade) which was on the railway to carry forward the troops in the sunken road. If,

¹ See p. 436.

as Br.-General Gellibrand believed, the trench was not held by the Australians, it must be taken ; if it was held, then the troops in it must be reinforced. Throughout the morning—it might almost be said, throughout the day—the commander of the 6th Brigade was to all intents and purposes in control of the effective attack on the whole front.

The advance of the company of the 26th Battalion began at 5.45 A.M. Rallied by their own officers, some two hundred men of the 5th Brigade followed as a second wave. It was found, as Br.-General Gellibrand had foretold, that the trench was not in the possession of the Australians. In fact, in face of hot fire, the advance broke down just short of the German front line, and only a handful of men under Captain Gilchrist jumped into the trench on the left. Here he took control of a party of the 24th Battalion, which, on finding the trench on its right empty, had advanced east of the Central Road, forming the boundary between the two brigades. With these troops he made desperate efforts to bomb his way eastward and to induce the men now lying in shell-holes in front of the trench to come forward and join him, but without success.

While this was going on, the 6th Brigade had advanced upon its second objective, the Fontaine—Quéant road, and on the right flank the line of a tramway just beyond the road. A party of the 24th Battalion reached this tramway ; another party of the 23rd—in second line and under orders to take the third objective—came up on its right at the cross-roads south-west of Riencourt. Captain P. G. R. Parkes, commanding the rear wave of this battalion, having observed that there was no sign of an advance on his right and that the Germans were standing up in their trenches to fire across the Central Road at the 6th Brigade, with great presence of mind wheeled his men right and lined the road in order to cover the flank. The left of the attack failed once again, and indeed on that flank the 6th Brigade was now engaged in a fierce bombing fight in the Hindenburg trenches. To go on was out of the question, and at 5.47 A.M. Br.-General Gellibrand asked for the “blue barrage”—a previously arranged protective barrage beyond the second objective. This was not given until 7 A.M., since General Birdwood had ordered the advance to be continued according to plan, but he cancelled this order on learning the true situation and the failure of the 62nd Division on the left. In an attempt to assist this division Major-General Smyth at 6.28 A.M. directed that another

battalion of the 7th Brigade, the 25th, should attack Bullecourt from the south-east across the open. Considering this method impracticable but not succeeding in having the order altered, Br.-General Gellibrand advised the battalion commander (who had received definite instructions through his own brigade headquarters) to test the possibility of such an attack by sending forward only two platoons in the first instance. They were met by a withering fire, which inflicted heavy loss and pinned them to the ground, whereupon the battalion was ordered to stand fast.

In the Hindenburg trenches the combat was swaying to and fro on both flanks. On the right in the German front trench the Australians, with the helmetless and coatless figure of Captain Gilchrist ever in the van, made considerable progress, but after he had been killed they were again driven back to the Central Road. In the support trench, however, they established a block about 150 yards east of the road and held it firmly. On the left, valiant attempts were made to bomb westward and capture the whole objective in the Hindenburg Line, but they did not succeed in penetrating beyond the point where the support trench crossed the Riencourt—Bullecourt road. On the second objective a strong counter-attack down the communication trench from Riencourt was beaten off. The troops on this objective were, however, in an untenable position, and when shells from their own artillery began to fall short among them on the tramway they made their way back by twos and threes to the Hindenburg trenches. By noon Br.-General Gellibrand had the barrage brought back to cover this line.

Meanwhile the 28th Battalion (7th Brigade) had been put at the disposal of Br.-General Smith for the purpose of securing the 5th Brigade's original objective in the Hindenburg Line. At 12.15 p.m. the battalion moved up the Central Road, which, being slightly sunken, afforded fair cover from view, filed into each of the Hindenburg trenches, and at 2 p.m. began to bomb eastward. All the afternoon the tide flowed and ebbed. Thrice the battalion reached the neighbourhood of the Noreuil—Riencourt road, 500 yards east of the Central Road; thrice it was forced back again. The last occasion was at 8.40 p.m. Immediately afterwards a heavy bombardment fell upon the area south of the Hindenburg Line and in the same area a number of men were seen moving across the open towards the Central Road. They were actually men of the 5th Brigade, who had

been lying out in shell-holes all day and were now retiring ; but in the failing light they were taken to be Germans attempting to cut off the whole of the advanced force. There followed a serious error of judgement. The 28th Battalion was exhausted by the long struggle, and a report had spread that the 6th Brigade on its left was falling back. Orders were given to it to withdraw, and with it went such fragments of the 5th Brigade as still remained and some other parties of the 7th which had been thrown into the fight.

There had, in fact, been no retirement on the part of the 6th Brigade, and its troops now disregarded the order to withdraw passed along to them. In this emergency they acted in accordance with the magnificent spirit they had shown all day. Little parties made their way along the support trench, blocked the exit of the communication trench from Riencourt, and also took station along the Central Road. Then these staunch troops awaited the relief which they so well deserved.

On the front of the V. Corps the 62nd Division (Major-General W. P. Braithwaite) attacked with all three brigades in line. Though the division had taken a creditable part in the minor operations of the German retirement earlier in the year, it had never been engaged in a major action, and in fact little over two months had elapsed since it first faced the enemy. The division had, however, constantly rehearsed this attack, in which it was supported by ten tanks of D Battalion, two of them being held in reserve. The 22nd Brigade of the 7th Division was also at the disposal of Major-General Braithwaite, as a reserve, and two of its battalions marched to Mory, five miles from Bullecourt, during the small hours of the morning.

A slight last-minute change was made in the forming-up line. Owing to the brightness of the moonlight the tapes were laid some hundred yards in rear of the Lagnicourt—St. Martin road, from which the left of the 185th Brigade and the two leading battalions of the 186th were to have started.¹

On the right, the 185th Brigade (Br.-General V. W. de Falbe) had the task of capturing Bullecourt itself. As the brigade had no further to go, one of its battalions,

¹ These troops are shown on Sketch 20 as starting from the road, to which they actually moved forward immediately the barrage opened. The tapes for the Australian troops were also placed somewhat further to the rear than had originally been projected, for the same reason.

the 2/8th West Yorkshire, had been detached to the 186th. Since both the first-line battalions were weak, these dispositions left the attack with dangerously little weight; and fighting in a village such as Bullecourt was bound to absorb a considerable number of troops. On the right, the 2/6th West Yorkshire suffered heavy casualties, especially from machine guns. Blinded by smoke blown back into their faces by a north-east wind, the troops inclined somewhat to the left and became intermingled with men of the left battalion, the 2/5th West Yorkshire. The first German trench was, however, captured, and part of one company established a post near the church, towards the northern edge of the village. The 2/5th West Yorkshire made its way into Bullecourt and right through the village until it was able to establish posts on the northern outskirts. Prompt support might have led to the consolidation of Bullecourt; but a company of the 2/7th West Yorkshire sent up to reinforce about 7.10 A.M. was checked short of the wire, and then, seeing troops of the 186th Brigade retiring in large numbers on its left, fell back to the railway embankment.

The 186th Brigade (Br.-General F. F. Hill) had three objectives: the Hindenburg Line; the Quéant—Fontaine road, with the German artillery protection line ("Artillerie-Schutzstellung"), which approximately followed its course; and the village of Hendecourt. On the right the wire proved no obstacle. The 2/5th Duke of Wellington's reached the support line and established touch with the 185th Brigade. The 2/6th Duke's on the left, however, found the wire imperfectly cut. The first wave got into shell-holes; those behind closed upon it, and there was such confusion, increased by bombs thrown by the Germans, that no further progress was made. The 2/4th Duke's in rear became involved, and a number of men of both battalions fell back to the railway. They were rallied and again led forward, but on this occasion did not cross the Lagnicourt—St. Martin road. While this was happening the two battalions in rear on the right, the 2/7th Duke's and 2/8th West Yorkshire (detached from the 185th Brigade) had gone forward into the breach created by the success on that flank. A strong party composed of men of both battalions actually penetrated as far as the factory north of Bullecourt, where they were recognized by an airman late in the afternoon.

The 187th Brigade (Br.-General R. O'B. Taylor) was

not to advance beyond the second objective, but had the task of providing the necessary defensive flank. Its attack fell into confusion equal to that of the 186th Brigade. At least part of the 2/4th York & Lancaster on the right reached the support trench. The 2/5th, on the left, crossed the first line without recognizing it and entered the sunken Lagnicourt—St. Martin road, but attempts to advance further were met by a fire so hot that a number of men remained in the road, while the majority fell back to the railway, carrying with them the bulk of the support battalions. The artillery barrage was brought back to the support trench till 9.30 A.M., and a new attack was launched, but it failed under heavy machine-gun fire.

The tanks of No. 12 Company, D Battalion, would on this occasion have been of invaluable service could the infantry have followed them, as the enemy's artillery appeared to be almost smothered by the British counter-battery fire. Three tanks entered Bullecourt. One of them was in the village for at least an hour and a half, but was hit and eventually set on fire during its return to the rallying-point. The second, under the command of 2nd Lieutenant C. M. Knight, came out with four of the crew wounded, exchanged them for sound men from a tank which had broken down, and went back again. The third reached the southern outskirts, and the commander got out to confer with the infantry and endeavour to induce them to follow. As they did not do so he returned to the front line, by which time so large a proportion of his men had been hit by armour-piercing bullets that he could no longer work the tank. Other tanks penetrated the Hindenburg Line north-west of Bullecourt, but either outdistanced the infantry or found it already retiring.

Efforts to reach the parties in the German lines proved fruitless, and by noon all these except—as was later learnt—that at the factory had been bombed out or captured. The 62nd Division could not renew the attack on a large scale. It had engaged all its battalions and suffered nearly 3,000 casualties; and even the strongest battalions were now too shaken to do more. On the other hand, if Bullecourt were not speedily taken, it was probable that the Australians would be unable to retain their grip upon the Hindenburg Line. Another reason for haste was that the VII. Corps was now reported to be in possession of Chérisy.¹ Lieut.-General Fanshawe, commanding the V.

¹ See p. 436.

Corps, therefore ordered the 7th Division to take over the right brigade sector of the 62nd Division and make a fresh attack on Bullecourt. The CCXC. and CCXCVI. Brigades R.F.A. (58th Division) and three extra howitzer batteries from the force hitherto at the disposal of the 62nd Division were handed over to the 7th.

The divisional commander, Major-General T. H. Shoubridge, went at 12.45 P.M. to the headquarters of the 22nd Brigade at Mory and directed Br.-General J. McC. Steele to launch an attack at 6.30 P.M. It soon appeared, however, that this would not allow time for all the necessary preparations or to identify the gaps in the wire by means of reconnaissances carried out in full view of the enemy. The operation was accordingly postponed until 10.30 P.M. The 2/H.A.C. and 1/R. Welch Fusiliers were to advance from the railway south of the village, their first objective being the trench on the southern outskirts, and their second that which ran through the centre. The other two battalions were to form up on the railway in readiness to go through and capture the remainder of the village on receiving orders to that effect.

The 2/H.A.C. was late in forming up, yet succeeded in reaching part of the second objective; the 1/R. Welch Fusiliers, finding great difficulty in discovering the gaps, captured the first only. Strong counter-attacks, one of which came along the uncaptured portion of the Hindenburg Line on the left of the 2nd Australian Division, then drove out both battalions, though a party of ten men of the H.A.C. maintained themselves in Bullecourt for three days and nights until rescued, and then brought out their Lewis gun. At 4 A.M. on the 4th May the 20/Manchester and 2/R. Warwickshire renewed the attack. This time a really heavy artillery barrage, the first so far experienced, fell exactly on the line upon which the battalions formed up, and the attack collapsed.

So, after 24 hours' fighting, no permanent success had been gained except on the front of the 6th Australian Brigade, and the permanence of that lodgement seemed very doubtful.

THE EVENTS OF THE 4TH-6TH MAY

On the front of the 2nd Australian Division Major-General Smyth had decided to use the battalions of the 1st Australian Brigade (1st Division), which had been

placed at his disposal by Lieut.-General Birdwood, commanding the I. Anzac Corps, in order to gain the whole of the original objective in the Hindenburg Line. He left Br.-Generals Smith and Gellibrand in control of the action, though they would neither have any of their own infantry under their command. In the case of the 6th Brigade, the weary troops could be relieved in the position they had gained and held before it was sought to extend it. As regards the 5th Brigade, however, it held no ground in the enemy's lines, and the fresh troops at its disposal could only make their way up the Central Road and bomb their way eastward. Along this road a communication trench had been completed by evening by the 2nd Australian Pioneers, whose devotion and self-sacrifice were attested by the numbers of their dead which fringed it.

Up this trench, named "Pioneer Avenue", the 3rd and 1st Australian Battalions filed, arriving at about 1 A.M. on the 4th May in the support and front Hindenburg trenches respectively. Before the relief was complete another strong counter-attack had to be met and repulsed, on the left only after hard fighting. Then and then only did the remnants of the 6th Brigade file out, having added one of the most glorious pages to the annals of Australian arms. The 2nd Battalion, attached to the 5th Brigade, also moved up Pioneer Avenue, but remained extended along this trench, only its head being engaged with the enemy, who was again attacking westward along both trenches of the Hindenburg Line.

At 1 P.M. the 1st Battalion began to bomb its way westward in the front line, and about an hour later the 3rd followed suit in the support. By this time the headquarters of the 1st Brigade had relieved that of the 6th, though Br.-General Gellibrand remained to assist and advise his successor, Lieut.-Colonel I. G. Mackay, until the evening.¹ Both battalions fought their way forward for some one hundred and fifty yards and finally established touch in a communication trench which joined the fire trenches wherein they were operating. The 2nd Battalion's attack eastward was delayed whilst arrangements—involving careful registration—were made to support it by a lateral artillery barrage. The attack, supported by the 4th Battalion, was

¹ As there appeared no likelihood of the 1st Australian Division being thrown into a battle, the commanders of the 1st and 3rd Brigades, Br.-Generals W. B. Leslie and H. Gordon Bennett, had been sent on leave simultaneously. The 3rd Brigade was temporarily commanded by Lieut.-Colonel L. M. Mullen.

excellently organized. The advance began at 3.40 P.M. and was made in the face of stubborn resistance. The fighting was close and furious; but finally, at 4 P.M. the communication trench west of the Riencourt—Noreuil road was reached. Measured by a straight line from flank to flank, the lodgement of the Australians in the Hindenburg Line now extended to just over 1,000 yards.

They were not left in undisturbed possession of it. The German shelling gradually increased, and at 9 P.M. attacks were launched on both flanks, as well as frontally from the direction of Riencourt. The frontal attack was obliterated by the Australian barrage; that on the right was driven off; and only on the left did the enemy succeed in gaining a little ground in the support trench. During the night the 3rd Brigade took over the sector east of the Central Road, the 11th and 12th Battalions relieving the 2nd and 4th.

So far as the 7th Division in front of Bullecourt was concerned, the situation was far from clear. There were reports of British parties at various points in the village—one at least, as has been explained, certainly true, and others possibly so. The 22nd Brigade was therefore instructed by Major-General Shoubridge to attempt to push strong patrols into Bullecourt after dark. The 2/R. Warwickshire and 1/R. Welch Fusiliers, advancing from the Lagnicourt—St. Martin road against the south-west corner, could not make an entry because the Germans had thrown fresh coils into the gaps in their wire. The posts of the two battalions on the road were then relieved by the 8/Devonshire (20th Brigade) which had been placed under the orders of Br.-General Steele.

5 May.

It was the intention of Major-General Smyth, commanding the 2nd Australian Division, that the fresh troops of the 3rd Brigade should continue on the 5th May the good work begun on the 4th and extend the lodgement in the Hindenburg Line eastward to the spur south of Riencourt. The two battalions east of the Central Road were, however, so fully occupied in keeping open their trenches, constantly blown in by the enemy's fire, that they could accomplish nothing more that day. And though insistent orders to carry out the attack at 5 A.M. on the 6th reached them later, the troops were so depleted and stunned by the tremendous bombardment that the officers on the spot decided to conserve their energies to meet the major counter-attack which seemed to be impending.

Again the action of the 7th Division was limited to discovering whether the enemy was still holding Bullecourt in strength. Reports were current that he was not doing so, but their origin apparently lay in his method of sheltering his garrison in the dug-outs and cellars, and bringing them into action only at the last moment. On this occasion the 8/Devonshire found the Germans as alert at the south side of Bullecourt as they had been at the south-west the previous evening. The 22nd Brigade was then relieved by the 20th, with orders to launch a fresh attack on the 7th May.

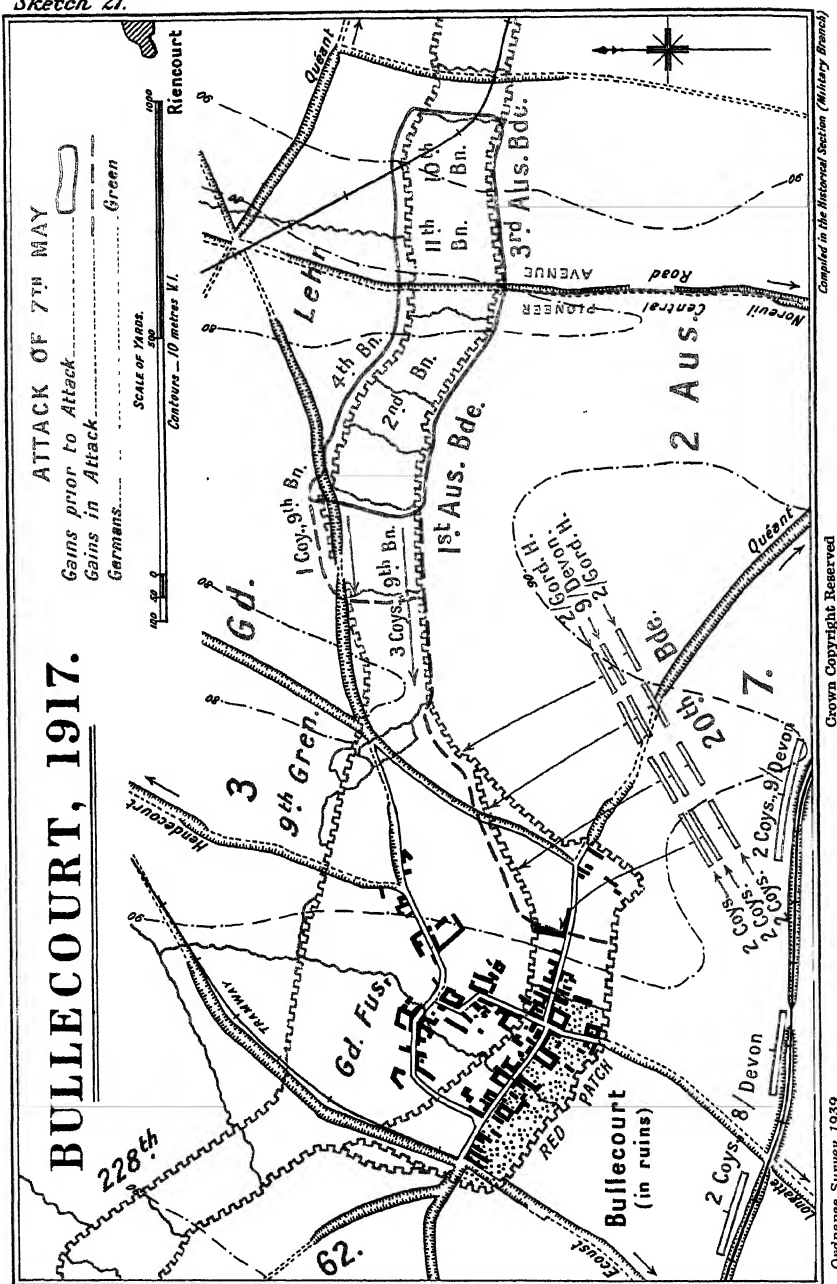
On the morning of the 6th the expected counter-attack fell upon the 3rd Australian Brigade. Isolated attacks were made in the early hours, and a company of the 10th Battalion was sent up to support the 12th. At 5.3 A.M. the enemy's fire reached what is described as "an unprecedented intensity", and a few minutes later the Germans advanced in strength from the north. Unfortunately for them, the flanking barrage, to cover the operation which the officers of the 11th and 12th Battalions had decided not to undertake, had not been cancelled. It caught the advancing waves and swept them away. A simultaneous advance up the Hindenburg Line from the east, however, proved far more dangerous. In the support trench the attack was beaten off after hard fighting, but in the front line the enemy, with the aid of *Flammenwerfer*, made swift and alarming progress. The Australians were driven back to the Central Road, and, shaken by their encounter with the most demoralizing weapon ever employed in trench fighting, retreated down Pioneer Avenue. The German advance was then stayed by the post of the 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, at the point of junction of the two trenches. A few minutes later Corporal G. J. Howell dashed out from the flank post and ran alongside the front Hindenburg Line throwing bombs down into it and causing the hostile bombers to run back. He was soon wounded, and fell into the trench; but in the interval the survivors of the 11th and 12th Battalions were rallied and, with a party of the 1st, led to the attack. The *Flammenwerfer* were out of action now, and without their support the Germans, bombed along the trench and shot at by Lewis guns pushed out into the shell-holes alongside it, were driven back headlong. Eventually the Australian barricade was established rather further east than before. Corporal Howell survived and received the award of the Victoria Cross.

After the fighting had died down Lieut.-Colonel Mullen, commanding the 3rd Brigade, placed the 10th Battalion at the most threatened point, on the right of the line, and withdrew the 12th to support. On the front of the 1st Brigade no incident of importance occurred. During the afternoon Lieut.-Colonel Mackay relieved the 1st and 3rd Battalions by the 4th and 2nd. The 9th Battalion, 3rd Brigade, having been put at his disposal, he sent it up after dark to the left of his line in order that a completely fresh unit should carry out, in concert with the 7th Division, the fresh attack now in preparation.

Thus, at the end of four days' fighting, on the British side two divisions, the 2nd Australian and the 62nd Divisions, had been used up, and two more, the 1st Australian Division (its troops fighting under the orders of the 2nd) and the 7th Division, had already suffered seriously. The Germans also, it had been discovered, had already been compelled to employ a large number of troops in defence, and especially in the half-dozen large-scale counter-attacks which they had launched. In the first place, it was established that the *27th Division* had, prior to the 3rd May, shortened its front. The *3rd Guard Division* had, after the raid on Lagnicourt, entered the line on the left of the *2nd Guard Reserve Division*, enabling the latter to take over from the *27th* to a point south-east of Riencourt. Yet the reserves thus provided had by no means sufficed this division. Already battalions of the *15th Reserve Regiment (2nd Guard Reserve Division)* and *Lehr Regiment (3rd Guard Division)* had been identified, and by the evening of the 6th it seemed certain that the whole of the *27th Division* had been relieved by the *3rd Guard*.¹

The operation originally intended as a stroke to aid the right wing of the Third Army was developing into a slow but ferocious struggle in which ground was disputed yard by yard. Bullecourt was still untaken, and unless it fell only two alternatives remained open, both grim to contemplate; either the Australians must abandon what they held, or brigade after brigade must enter the devouring maw, to emerge again in fragments.

¹ This was actually the case. First, the reserves of the *3rd Guard Division* were employed; then the whole division was relieved in the position mentioned above and put in. The British had not yet identified in Bullecourt the *98th Reserve Regiment, 207th Division*—doubtless used as a stop-gap until the rest of the *3rd Guard* was ready—and were unaware that the *207th* had come down from Flanders. It was afterwards used to relieve the *2nd Guard Reserve Division* in the sector south of Bullecourt.



THE EVENTS OF THE 7TH-17TH MAY

The orders of Lieut.-General Fanshawe, commanding the V. Corps were that the 7th Division should attack Bullecourt from the south-east. The objective was a limited one, a triangle comprising the south-east corner. Patrols were afterwards to attempt to reach the road on the northern side of the village. Meanwhile the south-west section—south of the lateral road and west of the Longatte—Bullecourt road—which stood on the highest ground and the machine-gun fire from which had been the chief factor in the previous failures, was to be kept under bombardment by the heavy artillery. On receipt of orders to this effect from divisional headquarters it was to be cleared as a separate operation. On maps now issued this area was painted red, and was hereafter known as “The “Red Patch”.”

7 May.
Map 8.
Sketch
21.

It had been arranged that the 2nd Australian Division should on the 6th May bomb along the first Hindenburg trench up to the 7th Division's objective in that trench, in order to cover the right flank of the attack. On learning, however, from Major-General Smyth that the Australians could not carry out this operation before 11 P.M., Major-General Shoubridge said that in these circumstances he would prefer that they should postpone their attack till morning and launch it simultaneously with his own. It was then agreed that the combined operation should take place at 3.45 A.M. on the 7th. The attack was to be covered by a rolling barrage, while a feint barrage was to be laid by the 62nd Division on the Hindenburg Line north-west of Bullecourt which this division had attacked on the 3rd May.

The 2/Gordon Highlanders of the 20th Brigade (Br.-General H. C. R. Green) formed up on tapes, with two companies of the 9/Devonshire to clear and garrison the front-line trench, which formed the first objective.¹ At Zero, in the light of a full moon now sinking in the heavens, the Gordons went forward with splendid dash and resolution. The first objective was taken; then without pause the Highlanders went on and took the second. One hundred and six prisoners and three machine guns were captured.

¹ The tapes could not be laid till after dark, and the Gordons did not arrive from their camp south of Mory till shortly before midnight. From then until the hour of the attack this battalion and the companies of the Devons were fairly heavily shelled.

On the second objective touch was established with the 1st Australian Brigade in the Hindenburg Line. The Australian attack was conducted with great skill; it might, indeed, stand as an example of the art of the bombing attack in trench warfare at its highest. It was covered by an artillery barrage fired in enfilade along the Hindenburg Line, by the fire of a medium trench mortar and of three Stokes, by that of Vickers and Lewis guns, and by showers of rifle grenades fired beyond the hand-thrown Mills. Bombers and rifle grenadiers worked in relays. The fighting was hard, but at 5.15 A.M. an officer of the Gordons was seen standing up on the parapet to indicate to the bombers that they had reached the right flank of the position held by their comrades.¹

The German artillery was at first doubtless unaware of the line held by their infantry in Bullecourt. As soon as they knew it—and nothing was more remarkable than the speed with which German troops generally contrived to convey such information—they opened a very heavy bombardment, which forced the Gordons to abandon a small portion of the second objective on the left. Major-General Shoubridge pressed Br.-General Green to capture the Red Patch that day with the 9/Devonshire; indeed, divisional headquarters believed that it was in great part seized but afterwards reconquered by the enemy. Actually, it appears that amid the heavy shelling no definite orders reached the leading companies. At all events, it was discovered that this section of the village had been reinforced and was strongly held by the enemy. It was on this day that the stout-hearted handful of the 2/H.A.C. holding out in Bullecourt was rescued. A communication trench from the railway to Bullecourt—begun on the night of the 4th but which could not be extended to the village until a definite lodgement was made in it—was completed by the 24/Manchester, the divisional pioneer battalion, and the 528th Field Company R.E. But for this piece of work, which was carried out with magnificent courage, it would have been impossible to keep the troops in the village supplied with small-arms ammunition and grenades.

The Australian left was now temporarily secure, but temporarily only, because the foothold of the 7th Division in Bullecourt, which assured it, was itself precarious. The rest of the battle resolves itself, in effect, into a series of

¹ A.O.A., iv., p. 528. This gallant officer, Captain M. L. Gordon, was killed shortly afterwards.

attempts to clear the whole village, especially the dominating Red Patch, and of German counter-attacks to drive the aggressors out of it and of the Hindenburg Line. 8 May.

On the night of the 7th the 2nd Australian Brigade relieved the 1st. The 2nd Brigade had, it will be recalled, been holding the inactive Lagnicourt sector since before the opening of the operations. It had been relieved on the night of the 5th by the 175th Brigade (58th Division), which had come under the orders of Major-General Smyth.

At 11 A.M. on the 8th May the 8/Devonshire of the 20th Brigade attacked the Red Patch, bombing down the trench south of Bullecourt. The fine weather had been broken by rain during the night and the heavily-bombarded trenches were now full of sticky mud. The attack made good progress at first, but was presently driven back again. That night the 2/Border Regiment, which had relieved the Gordons, established a post at the north-east corner of the Red Patch and maintained it despite constant bombardment. Meanwhile the 8th Battalion of the 2nd Australian Brigade had, as a diversion, bombed down the support Hindenburg Line for 150 yards towards Bullecourt, meeting with but slight opposition. The 2nd Australian Division had now employed all its own infantry brigades and all those of the 1st Division, though the 2nd Brigade had not suffered serious loss. Fresh troops therefore took over the Australian sector that night.

The 5th Australian Division had been resting in the belated spring weather, with no thought of immediate battle. In fact, officers and men were concerned chiefly with sports and a horse show, both of which were to be held on an unusually grand scale. But on the very first day of the Bullecourt operation Lieut.-General Birdwood and his B.G.G.S., Major-General White, had realized that it might well develop into a long-drawn-out fight. That afternoon a staff officer of the I. Anzac Corps telephoned to divisional headquarters the unwelcome message: "General White asked me to tell you to have a brigade of infantry 'ready to entrain at Albert at four hours' notice". Br.-General C. J. Hobkirk, commanding the 14th Brigade, was warned to hold himself in readiness to entrain the dismounted portion of his brigade and move his transport by road. The sports and horse show were, in fact, held with great success, but the 14th Brigade moved up to the Bapaume area on the 7th May and on the night of the 8th relieved the 3rd Brigade east of the Central Road. During

9 May. the following night the 15th Brigade took over from the 2nd west of the road, and on the 10th Major-General J. J. T. Hobbs, 5th Australian Division, assumed command of the front. The 9th and 10th May were relatively quiet days on the front of the I. Anzac Corps and were devoted to improvement of the defences.

In Bullecourt, however, there could in present circumstances be no respite. On the 9th the 8/Devonshire renewed its attack on the Red Patch with two fresh companies. Again the battalion forced its way in, and again it was expelled, the Germans actually gaining a little ground, though this was recovered later. No more was attempted on the 10th, and that night the exhausted 20th Brigade was relieved by the 91st.¹

12 May. The next attack, that of the 91st Brigade (Br.-General H. R. Cumming), was launched at 3.40 A.M. on the 12th May, by the 2/Queen's and 1/South Staffordshire, the objective this time being the whole of Bullecourt. The barrage was slow, moving at the rate of 100 yards in six minutes, with 4.5-inch howitzers firing 50 yards ahead of the 18-pdrs. The 15th Australian Brigade was to advance westward to join hands with the 91st at the cross-roads north-east of the village; and the 62nd Division was to establish itself at the Crucifix north-west of the Red Patch.

The 2/Queen's went forward brilliantly and took the right of the objective up to the church, the battalion's posts being clearly shown on an aeroplane photograph taken just afterwards. The left of the 1/South Staffordshire failed—the Red Patch was living up to its name—but its right reached the northern and north-western outskirts of the village. The 185th Brigade of the 62nd Division reached the Crucifix, but was bombed out again.

In order to avoid the British barrage, the Australian attack was launched 14 minutes after that of the 91st Brigade. The 58th Battalion advanced down the Hindenburg support trench, and after bitter fighting both in the trench and in the open drove the opposing Germans to shelter in a huge dug-out in the sunken Riencourt—Bullecourt road, where no less than 186 surrendered. This great success was largely due to the leadership of Lieutenant R. V. Moon, who, though twice wounded, was always in the forefront, until he received his third wound after the

¹ It was the 91st Brigade which had supplied the two battalions between the Ecoust—Fontaine road and the Sensée (see p. 459). They had been relieved by the 62nd Division on the night of 4th May.

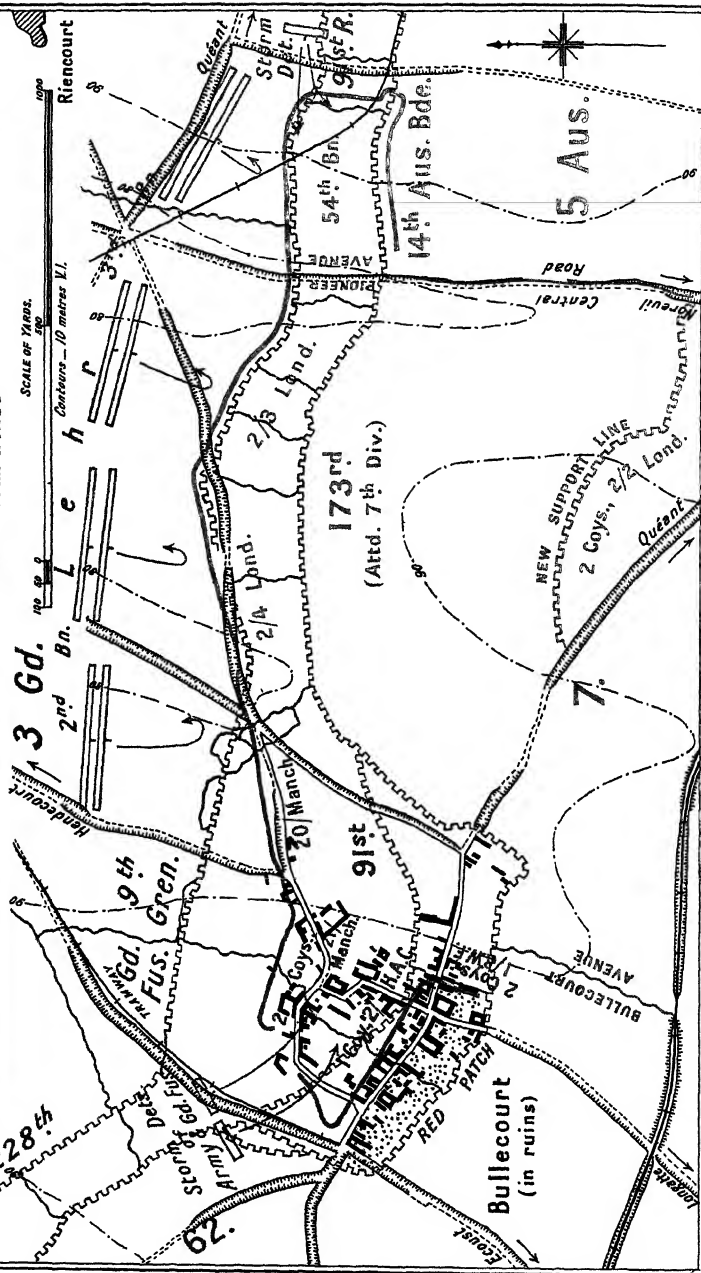
BULLECOURT, 1917.

COUNTER-ATTACK
15TH MAY.

British Red Germans Green

SCALE OF YARDS.

Contours - 10 metres V.L.



Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

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Ordnance Survey 1939.

attack had been driven home. He was awarded the Victoria Cross. The actual cross-roads could not be occupied owing to fire, but another company of the 58th, advancing across the open from the front Hindenburg Line, reached the road bank a little further west and established touch with the 2/Queen's. On the other flank a party of the 2/7th West Yorkshire of the 62nd Division was observed from the air to have reached the Crucifix, but none returned, and the enemy was in occupation of the strong point there by the evening.

The situation in Bullecourt was now extraordinary. The British held the whole village except the Red Patch—though there was a gap in the line at the north-west—but to that the Germans clung with grim pertinacity, apparently using the sunk road west of the village to communicate with it.

General Gough was anxious to withdraw all the Australian troops to rest as soon as possible.¹ That night, therefore, the 173rd Brigade of the 58th Division relieved the 15th Australian Brigade, and its front was taken over by the 7th Division.² Of the newly captured position the I. Anzac Corps was now responsible only for the portion east of the Central Road, held by a single battalion of the 14th Australian Brigade.

Br.-General Cumming proposed to continue the 91st 13 May. Brigade's attack on the Red Patch from the east, in the hope of cutting off the garrison. Major-General Shoubridge disagreed, and replaced him in command by Colonel W. W. Norman, 21/Manchester. The attack was then made

¹ The I. Anzac Corps had been in the Somme fighting all the autumn and winter, and actively engaged ever since. Major-General Hobbs had protested against the employment of the 5th Australian Division after so short a rest and stated that there was much talk on the subject among the troops. It was owing to Lieut.-General Birdwood's representations that orders issued for the 1st Australian Division to relieve the 11th Division—under orders for Flanders—in the right sector were cancelled, and the 48th Division from the Fourth Army was hurriedly handed over to carry out the relief instead (A.O.A., iv., p. 684).

It must be realized that Lieut.-General Birdwood spoke in such circumstances in a capacity more important than that of commander of the I. Anzac Corps. He was also—since September 1916, formally, and since September 1915, in effect—administrative commander of the Australian Imperial Force, and as such the representative of the Australian Government.

² The 7th Division at the same time took over the whole of the CCCX. and CCCXII. Brigades R.F.A., of which it had had from the first (see p. 466) the howitzer batteries. It required this artillery to cover the extra front because the I. and II. A.F.A. Brigades were pulling out, to relieve two Australian Army brigades in the right sector of the corps front and allow them to proceed to Flanders.

simultaneously from the south-west by the 2/R. Warwickshire (detached from the 22nd Brigade) and by two companies of the 22/Manchester from the north-east. This was, as will be obvious, a very difficult operation from the artillery point of view, and, in fact, the Manchester's barrage fell short. No permanent progress was achieved either then or in a further attempt made later in the day.

14 May.

On the 14th May another battalion of the 22nd Brigade, the 1/R. Welch Fusiliers, already heavily engaged, was put at the disposal of the 91st Brigade, and made three successive attacks on the Red Patch—from the east, as had been the original intention of Br.-General Cumming. The third, at 2.30 P.M., partially succeeded, but the aggressors were obliged to withdraw owing to their bomb dump having been blown up at the critical moment. That night the line in Bullecourt was taken over by the 20/Manchester (22nd Brigade), 2/H.A.C. (22nd Brigade) and 21/Manchester (91st Brigade), all under the command of Lieut.-Colonel W. G. Holmes, 1/R. Welch Fusiliers.

15 May.
Sketch
22.

On the 15th May came the last and biggest counter-attack. It extended over the whole front of the captured position, which it was designed to recapture in its entirety. There was an intense bombardment during the preceding night, causing heavy casualties and destroying much of the work done to secure the defence of the position in the Hindenburg Line.¹ In the early hours of the morning trench mortars joined in, levelling the trenches with their big projectiles. The British protective barrage was put down, though the field artillery batteries were enveloped in gas, and the counter-batteries followed suit. The flashes of explosions, the fantastic firework display as rockets of all colours were flung up, calling, it might be, for aid, for fire to lengthen, or for fire to shorten—no observer could in the confusion recognize signals or even tell whose were the rockets—made a truly awful and infernal battle picture, to which the din was fitting accompaniment.

A little before 4 A.M. the Germans assaulted. Their frontal attack on the 54th Battalion of the 14th Australian Brigade was smashed, but on the extreme right parties broke in and captured about 150 yards of the Hindenburg support line and part of the communication trench leading to the first. After a fierce encounter those not killed were

¹ General von Moser, in "Feldzugsaufzeichnungen", p. 277, states that some 60,000 rounds of high-explosive and gas shell were fired by 31 batteries into the "English nest".

expelled, to be raked by infantry fire or driven into the British barrage.

Further west the troops of Br.-General B. C. Freyberg's 173rd Brigade, who were fighting their first battle, though the same could certainly not be said of their brigadier, beat off the assault and captured six prisoners in full marching order, sure indication that the operation was intended to be decisive. They even contrived to help their neighbours on the right ; for Lieut.-Colonel the Rev. P. W. Beresford of the 2/3rd London Regiment led up his reserve companies at the height of the crisis and assisted the 14th Australian Brigade to restore its line. The Australians, who had been somewhat perturbed by the substitution of untried troops for those of the 7th Division on their left, were warmly appreciative of the action of the Londoners.

Only in Bullecourt did the German attack meet with any success. Here, after a prolonged and fluctuating struggle, the 91st Brigade retained the village east of the Longatte road, but nothing west of it. Later in the morning the line along the Longatte road was broken by another attack, which penetrated to the south-east corner of the village. The position along the road was restored by a counter-attack carried out by a company of the 20/Manchester, which was held in reserve and represented almost the only infantry unit more or less intact.

The prisoners captured stated that the main attack had been carried out by the *Lehr Regiment* (3rd Guard Division), which had been taken out of the line for special training, being temporarily replaced by the *91st Regiment* (2nd Guard Reserve Division). The men, it was said, had been supremely confident of success.¹

The 7th Division had now been engaged for twelve days and was completely exhausted. That night, therefore, the 174th Brigade of the 58th Division relieved the 91st

¹ A storm detachment of the *91st Regiment* attacked on the extreme left and storm detachments of the Army and *Guard-Fusilier Regiment* on the extreme right. It was these storm troops which made ground, though the lodgement on the Australian right was only temporary. The *Lehr Regiment's* attack was a complete failure.

The attack had been originally fixed for 9th May, and postponed at the instance of the *Sixth Army* Chief of the Staff, Colonel von Lossberg, until the 14th in order to provide additional ammunition. The corps commander, General von Moser, would rather have attacked while the *3rd Guard Division* was comparatively fresh and, as he thought, the British were unprepared to meet an assault. He protested against the decision, but was overruled. Finally the attack was postponed for yet another day. ("Feldzugsaufzeichnungen", p. 275.)

in Bullecourt and next morning the divisional commander, Major-General H. D. Fanshawe, took over command of the front west of the Central Road, having in line his own two brigades, 173rd on the right and 174th on the left.¹ Orders were at once issued for the capture of the west half of Bullecourt by the 174th during the following night. Meanwhile, at 6.30 P.M. on the 16th, a company of the 2/1st London, 173rd Brigade, captured the Hindenburg support trench as far west as the eastern road to Hendecourt together with a few prisoners.

The main attack of the 174th Brigade (Br.-General C. G. Higgins) was a frontal assault on the Red Patch launched by the 2/5th London (London Rifle Brigade) at 2 A.M. on the 17th May, from a line in front of the railway.² It was preceded by a hurricane bombardment lasting only two minutes, at the end of which the Londoners swept in and quickly secured the whole of the area, with 23 prisoners and five machine guns. As soon as this had been accomplished a company of the 2/8th London (Post Office Rifles), facing west on the Longatte road, passed across the front of the 2/5th, scrambled through the ruins and débris, and cleared the rest of the village, taking another 18 prisoners.

The German official communiqué stated that Bullecourt was evacuated in accordance with orders. What actually occurred, as prisoners testified, was that the enemy was caught in the midst of preparations, such as the demolition of cellars and dug-outs, for evacuation of the section which he still held.

This morning's success marks, according to the official reckoning, the end of the battle, though some local encounters took place during the next few days. While it had been going on the Commander-in-Chief had definitely decided to embark upon the Flanders offensive. The continuation of the action was due, then, in part to his intention that the enemy should not be allowed to guess, from a sudden subsidence of British activity, that the Battles

¹ The 175th Brigade, which had (see p. 473) been holding the Lagnicourt sector on the Australian front, had been relieved by 8th Australian Brigade, on the night of the 12th and was now in reserve.

² The commanding officer, Lieut.-Colonel P. D. Stewart, had first of all been instructed to take his battalion into Bullecourt, to continue the attack from the east. After a personal reconnaissance he decided that the situation was so obscure in the village and there was so much shooting from all sides that it would be a mistake to do so. On the other hand, he could see no wire south of the Red Patch. He therefore obtained permission to carry out the operation from the south.

of Arras had been broken off. It was not the sole operation fought for this purpose ; for before it had ended another attack had been launched against the Chemical Works at Roeux, and after it was over further attempts were made against the Hindenburg Line near Bullecourt. It was, however, by far the most important and prolonged. The second reason why Sir Douglas Haig continued the offensive was because it was impossible to stop it until Bullecourt was taken and firmly held, without subjecting the Australians in the Hindenburg Line east of the village to intolerable strain and danger.

The result was a battle in which, with occasional lulls, the fighting was intense for a fortnight, with extraordinary expenditure of ammunition and the most ghastly accompaniments. By the end the dead of both sides lay in clumps all over the battlefield, and in the bottom or under the parapets of the trenches many hundreds had been hastily covered with a little earth. One witness, after speaking of the nauseating stench, expresses his astonishment " that any human beings could hold and fight under these conditions ". He adds that he never saw a battlefield, Ypres in 1917 not excepted, where the living and the unburied dead remained in such close proximity for so long. On the other hand, life behind the line was almost normal ; battalions relieved each other as on fronts where no active operations were in progress ; and although the shelling of the railway was often intense, south of it the ordinary routine was little disturbed.

The British losses were extremely heavy. Those of the I. Anzac Corps numbered 292 officers and 7,190 other ranks, not including some forty in the attached British heavy artillery.¹ Those of the V. Corps were approximately 300 officers and 6,500 other ranks.² The total casualties were therefore over 14,000, or a thousand a day.

The total of the German losses has not been revealed. Two divisions, the *27th* and *3rd Guard*, had been engaged

¹ A.O.A., p. 548. 2nd Australian Division, 178 officers and 3,725 other ranks ; 1st Australian Division (troops engaged under orders of 2nd), 80 officers, and 2,261 other ranks ; 5th Australian Division, 39 officers and 1,204 other ranks.

² The 62nd Division lost 148 officers and 3,284 other ranks. The casualties of the 7th Division were 128 officers and 2,554 other ranks. Those of the 58th Division, not including the 175th Brigade in the inactive Lagnicourt sector, were 32 officers and 680 other ranks.

It is worth while noting that 79 officers and men of the 7th Division reported as wounded remained at duty, roughly $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. of the total wounded. No similar casualties would be counted in German returns.

complete, and were both known to have suffered severely.¹ In all, twelve regiments, the equivalent of four divisions, had taken part in the Second Battle of Bullecourt.

It is this aspect of the fight, its bloodiness, that has made most impression. "Second Bullecourt" has had the reputation of a killing-match, typifying trench warfare at its most murderous, its only redeeming feature being the courage shown on both sides. The courage, at least, cannot be questioned. The most striking feat of arms was that of the 6th Australian Brigade in redeeming the unfortunate failure on its right. The Australian troops who followed it could only take it as a pattern, and this they did. The dogged persistence of the 7th Division through twelve days of bitter fighting was certainly no less meritorious. The young troops of the 62nd Division gave of their best, and would probably have taken and held Bullecourt had their objectives been less extended. The equally untried 58th Division, coming in at the close, showed itself staunch in defence and willing in attack. All the German troops fought hard, and reckless bravery was shown in some of their counter-attacks.

Yet it does not suffice to dismiss the battle thus, whatever be the view as to its instigation. Tactical skill of a high order was shown repeatedly, especially in the Australian bombing operations, which in their kind were probably never surpassed. Several of them were conducted with almost clockwork precision, the bombers fighting in relays, covered by lateral artillery barrages, by trench mortars, and by Lewis guns established on the flanks in shell-craters outside the trenches. Outraged by the German egg-bombs and even by the stick-bombs, the attackers outfought the enemy by firing barrages of rifle grenades beyond the

¹ The infantry casualties of the 27th Division are given in the regimental histories as 2,304, so that the casualties of the division as a whole must have been over 2,500. In the 3rd Guard Division the combined losses of two regiments were 1,146. The third regiment, the *Lehr*, gives only its casualties up to the evening of the 6th May, and again for the attack on the 15th, the total for the two being 727. The casualties of this division must have been well over 2,000. In both cases the losses would be based on German methods of reporting, not including lightly wounded.

In addition to these two divisions two regiments of the 2nd Guard Reserve Division (15th and 91st Reserve Regiments), one of the 207th Division (98th Reserve Regiment, which had very hard fighting), and one of the 38th Division (96th Regiment) had been thrown into the battle. The left of the 49th Reserve Division (228th Regiment) had been heavily engaged at the outset. And at the end of the battle the 26th Reserve Division had relieved the 3rd Guard at Bullecourt and one of its regiments, the 121st Reserve, had been identified by prisoners.

hand-thrown Mills bombs. On one occasion, when rifle grenades ran short the Australian throwers closed on the defence so that the German missiles fell behind them, while their own heavier Mills bombs found their target. The field artillery was handled with remarkable boldness as regards targets, and though, inevitably, the infantry on occasion suffered in consequence, these experiments in close support were in general successful.

The Battle of Bullecourt is instructive as well as terrible to contemplate.

CHAPTER XIX

THE FRENCH APRIL OFFENSIVES

(Maps 11, 12 ; Sketch 4)

GENERAL NIVELLE AND EXTERIOR OPERATIONS

THOUGH General Nivelle had not been accorded the same powers as his predecessor, General Joffre, he had from the first made himself felt outside his own command. The offensive which he had in project was by far the most important contemplated on any front, and all others might therefore be regarded as subsidiary. That in itself not only brought the other offensives within his purview, but authorized him to ensure that with regard to time and place they should as far as possible harmonize with his own conception. This situation, coupled with his personal energy, self-confidence, and persuasiveness, helped to compensate for his lack of special powers. He had induced the British Government to give him a measure of control over their forces on the Western Front considerably in excess of that wielded by General Joffre. With Italy and Russia he was less successful, but his interventions there were not without importance.

So far from finding the Italians inclined to take part in an offensive on a grand scale, he discovered that he had rather to reassure the Comando Supremo, which, after the overthrow of Rumania, was apprehensive of a strong German attack on Italy. Nor was the anxiety of General Cadorna groundless ; for the commands of the Central Powers had, in fact, closely studied the question.¹

¹ About twelve German divisions were to have been employed, and preparations were actually begun in Tyrol at the end of January 1917. The discovery that it would be hardly possible to anticipate the Italian offensive and still more the situation on the Western Front killed the scheme. On 25th February Hindenburg informed Field-Marshal Conrad von Hötzendorf, Chief of the Austrian General Staff, that no German troops were available.

Major Wetzell, Chief of the Operations Section of the German General Staff, considered that the chief advantage of such an operation would be

The Italians even professed to have evidence that Germany was contemplating an invasion by way of Switzerland. General Nivelle accordingly sent officers to Italy to discuss the question of support in case of need. Then followed the Rome Conference, beginning on the 4th January 1917, at which Mr. Lloyd George's plan of lending British heavy artillery to the Italians for an offensive against Trieste was shelved.¹ On the 1st February General Nivelle himself arrived at Udine for a two days' visit to the Isonzo front. He examined with General Cadorna the possibility of a German invasion through Switzerland, which he did not by any means wholly discount. He suggested, however, that climatic conditions would protect the Italian left until the month of May; meanwhile he trusted that the Italians would launch an attack on the Isonzo to coincide with the Franco-British offensives in France. General Cadorna was doubtful whether he could be ready by the 1st April.² Eventually his offensive, the Tenth Battle of the Isonzo, was launched on the 12th May, after the Allied spring offensives in France were virtually over. It resulted in considerable local successes both on the shore of the Gulf of Trieste and north of Gorizia.

It was apparent to General Nivelle that if the Germans did violate Swiss neutrality it might not be only for the sake of invading Italy. A thrust in the direction of Lyons might be part or even the principal feature of their plan. General Foch was directed to study this question.³ In

the easing of the situation on the Western Front. "The Frenchman will 'have no choice; he must help'" (G.O.A. xi, p. 491). Had the Germans known that Allied statesmen and even General Foch (F.O.A. v. (i.), Annexe 1189) were discussing the despatch of troops to Italy without waiting for the danger to materialize, they would have been delighted.

¹ See p. 44.

² F.O.A. v. (i.), p. 195 *et seq.* Except as otherwise stated, this volume is the authority for French plans and operations described in this chapter, though not always for deductions from facts. The Italian official account has not yet reached 1917.

³ For this purpose General Foch installed himself at Senlis, near the G.Q.G., without a command, on 27th December 1916. On 19th January 1917 he was given command of the two eastern Armies, the Seventh and Eighth, which now formed the "Groupement Foch". He remained in this command until 28th March, when the Groupe d'Armées de l'Est (consisting of the same two Armies) was re-formed, and General de Castelnau, back from Russia, took over command. General Foch then returned to Senlis, but in early April went on a mission to Italy, to discuss with General Cadorna the question of French reinforcements in case of an Austro-German offensive in great strength. At the moment of his departure M. Painlevé addressed to him a letter, informing him pointedly that his mission was from the Government and that his reports should be directed to the Minister of War.

either case a counter-thrust against the right flank and communications of the German striking force seemed the best riposte. Plans were made to concentrate within ten days three armies with a total of 30 divisions, to be known as the *Groupe d'Armées d'Helvétie*, under the command of General Foch, for this purpose. Swiss concurrence was obtained only after long negotiations. On the 5th April Colonel Sprecher von Bernegg, the Swiss Chief of the General Staff, received General Weygand, Chief of the Staff to General Foch, at Berne. The Swiss agreed verbally to allow the French to assist them if their neutrality were violated, but no troops were to cross the frontier without an invitation from the Swiss Government, to be given only on receipt of a German ultimatum demanding right of passage through their territories. The arrangement was not wholly satisfactory, because it allowed the Germans too long a start if they decided to strike. On the other hand, the establishment of these relations gave the French a better hope of receiving warning before the delivery of an ultimatum. The negotiations and plans were certainly to the credit of General Nivelle.

He played a less important part with regard to Russia ; but his representations to the French Government formed the basis of the military discussions at the Inter-Allied Conference in Petrograd. This was one of the most comprehensive and longest of all such meetings, lasting from the 1st to the 20th February and dealing with matters political, economic and financial, as well as military.¹ The chief political problem was the crisis in Greece.² The various economic and financial committees were mainly concerned with measures to assist Russia, especially in respect of munitions.

On the purely military side, the Russians stated that climatic conditions would not permit them to launch an offensive on their own front before the 1st May, a month after the date at that time projected for the commencement of the offensive in France. Regarding the Rumanian front, General Nivelle had felt some anxiety lest the Russo-Rumanian forces should abandon the Siret, and thus lose north-eastern Moldavia, perhaps even Bessarabia. Actually,

¹ Great Britain was represented by Lord Milner (Minister without Portfolio and member of the War Cabinet), Sir George Buchanan (Ambassador), Lord Revelstoke (Minister Plenipotentiary), and Lieut.-General Sir Henry Wilson ; France by M. Doumergue (Colonies), M. Paléologue (Ambassador), and General de Castelnau.

² See "Macedonia", Vol. I., Chapters X. and XV.

they held on, and the Austro-Germans were too worn out by fighting and marching to force the line of the river. The French Commander-in-Chief was also anxious that on the Rumanian front, where operations would be practicable in March, an offensive should be begun in the course of that month. General de Castelnau learnt, however, from General Berthelot, Chief of the French Military Mission with the Rumanian Armies, that these forces could not be reconstituted before mid-May.

General de Castelnau considered that the Russians were capable of immobilizing the opposing forces, but that no more could be expected of them in the year 1917. Even this hope was to be shattered by the outbreak of the Revolution on the 12th March. The Russian offensive did not take place until the 29th June. It collapsed after some early successes, and, indeed, led to the break-up of the Army and finally, on the 15th December, to the Armistice of Brest-Litovsk. Arrangements for the participation of the Allied forces in Macedonia were also made, at two conferences, that at Calais on the 26th and 27th February, which has already been mentioned, and that at Saint Jean de Maurienne, on the 19th April.¹

On the whole, it could not be said that prospects of assistance from the exterior European theatres of war were as rosy as in 1916. Actually there was no success gained in the least comparable to the "Brusilov Offensive", and none even equal to the Sixth Battle of the Isonzo or the Battle of Monastir.

PREPARATIONS AND PREOCCUPATIONS

An outline of the plans of General Nivelle prior to the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line has already been given.² It has sometimes been asserted that the retreat destroyed the very basis of the scheme; but this is an exaggeration. The retreat actually, as we have seen, weakened the British co-operation considerably and virtually nullified that of the G.A.N. All the latter was able to effect was a minor attack on the Hindenburg Line at St. Quentin on the 18th April, and this had no success. Most important of all, the withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line allowed the enemy to dispose of 14 divisions hitherto

¹ For the projects and operations in this theatre during the spring see "Macedonia", Vol. I., Chapter XIII.

² See p. 46.

employed in the defence of his original front. Yet from the French point of view the episode had also its credit side. It enabled the French to attack the German position north of the Aisne in flank—between the Fort de Condé and Vauxaillon—as well as frontally, and, what was equally important, to enfilade with artillery fire the western half of the defences on the Chemin des Dames. And if it provided the enemy with a reserve, it also largely increased the resources of the French. By the 22nd March the G.A.N., whose front had been shortened by 13 miles, had been reduced by two cavalry and eleven infantry divisions, and some 550 pieces of heavy artillery, all of which were now at the disposal of General Nivelle.

General Pétain made a striking proposal for the employment of these reserves. If they were handed over to him, the G.A.C. under his command would carry out a major offensive astride the Suippes, 16 miles east of Reims, which would replace the attack of the G.A.N. in the Somme area. To be wise after the event is easy; yet it must be admitted that naught could have been more embarrassing to the German command than such an operation. The new German system of defence required if possible two counter-attack divisions behind every three front-line divisions subjected to attack, and at the lowest one to two; the German numbers were inferior and the reserves strictly limited; the strain of a big offensive east of Reims would have been very difficult to support. From General Nivelle's point of view, however, the fatal objection to the scheme was that General Pétain could not complete his preparations before the 1st May, which would necessitate a postponement of the main operation. Like Sir Douglas Haig on his front, General Nivelle was now somewhat anxious lest the enemy should make a further withdrawal before he could strike. He therefore allotted a large proportion of the reserves to the G.A.R., but kept them under his own hand. The rôle of the G.A.C. was to be confined to an attack west of the Suippes.

On the 22nd March General Micheler, commanding the G.A.R., the very instrument of General Nivelle's offensive, addressed to the Commander-in-Chief a letter embodying his doubts with regard to the offensive, which had that day been provisionally fixed for the 8th April. He pointed out that when the plan was first conceived the G.A.R. had been instructed to attack comparatively weak defences—in general, only two successive fortified positions—which were

not very strongly held; in such conditions a swift and powerful surprise assault stood every chance of success, especially as the German reserves would be attracted to the fronts of the G.A.N. and the British Armies, which were to attack earlier.

Now, went on General Micheler, the enemy had not only thickened his front and established four in place of two fortified positions—which indicated that he expected to be attacked—but had also available considerably more reserves; meanwhile the attack of the G.A.N. had for practical purposes dropped out of the scheme, and the British were, he understood, to launch their offensive on the same day as his own, the 8th April. For these reasons, he concluded, it seemed impossible to rely upon the breakthrough being carried out with the speed anticipated; as for the phase of exploitation, that appeared to be even more prejudiced by the new situation.

On one point, and one only, General Nivelle at once met the views of his subordinate. Adhering to his decision that the 8th April was to be Z day, he stated that only the British attack would be launched on that date; the G.A.N.'s minor attack would be carried out on Z+2 day, the main attack of the G.A.R. on Z+4 day (the 12th), and the attack of the G.A.C. on Z+5 day.¹ Regarding the methods of attack General Nivelle would hear of no alteration. "Rien n'est changé aux conditions de la rupture", he wrote to General Micheler on the 1st April. In the same letter he directed him to rewrite his instructions for the exploitation—which had contemplated a slower rate of progress in view of the new conditions—in order to invest them with a more offensive character.

From the point of view of British official history it is unnecessary to deal with previous misgivings of General Micheler as to the soundness of the plan. It must, however, be pointed out that they had existed, even as early as the month of January, and that on several occasions they had been communicated to M. Antonin Dubost, President of the Senate.² He was not the only doubter.

The German retirement had practically coincided with two important events, both of which affected General Nivelle's scheme adversely. The first was the Russian

¹ The symbol "Z" has been used, as familiar to British readers. The French used "J" (*jour*) in this sense.

² The attitude of General Micheler is described at length by Colonel Herbillon, "Le Général Alfred Micheler", Chapters X.-XII.

Revolution on the 12th March. Though some public men in France and Great Britain professed the belief that it would give fresh energy to Russia, their attitude may perhaps be likened to that of a man whistling to keep his spirits up. There was, at all events, a general feeling that at best the process of revitalization would be a long one and that there would be temporary weakness and confusion. The prospect of a Russian offensive in time to be of service to General Nivelle had now disappeared.

The second event was the fall of the Ministry over which M. Briand presided.¹ The new President of the Council, M. Ribot, was apparently strongly influenced in military matters by the Minister of War, M. Painlevé, and the latter was from the outset hostile to General Nivelle and his scheme. Over the head of the Commander-in-Chief he had interviews with the Army Group commanders, Generals Franchet d'Espérey, Micheler and Pétain, who did not conceal from him their view that the projected operations were unlikely to produce the results expected by General Nivelle. The breaking-off of relations between the United States and Germany furnished M. Painlevé with the argument that it was advisable to defer the offensive until American aid could be given on the Western Front.² Thus, above and below him General Nivelle found want of confidence, and that below was not confined to the Army Group commanders. How far these doubts among soldiers were the effect or the cause of the political disquietude it would not be profitable to enquire; but certainly that faith which, in General Nivelle's own words to the British War Cabinet, is necessary to bring any great military operation to success, was lacking among many of his subordinates.

However, after General Nivelle had met the Comité de Guerre on the 3rd April, it appeared that agreement had been reached and that the offensive could go forward as arranged.³ Next day, in fact, General Nivelle issued his final instructions, to which we must return a little later. But on the 5th April there came a bombshell in the shape

¹ See p. 59.

² It must be recalled (see p. 34) that relations were broken off as early as 3rd February, and that thereafter all the signs pointed to war, though war was not formally declared until 6th April.

³ M. Ribot had undone his predecessor's work in the formation of the Comité de Guerre. Holding that the Cabinet could not delegate its authority to an inner Cabinet, he had increased the numbers of the committee's members and reduced it to an advisory rôle—"une cellule du conseil des ministres". (F.O.A. v. (i.), p. 561.)

of a letter from a comparatively junior officer handed directly to the President of the Council.

The writer, Colonel Messimy, was the commander of the infantry of a division in the Tenth, the Reserve, Army, but he was also a Deputy and an ex-Minister of War.¹ He informed M. Ribot, moreover, that the note had been almost dictated to him by one of the principal executants of the operations. The inference that this was General Micheler was obvious and was in fact correct, though the commander of the G.A.R. did not agree that his views had been correctly reproduced.² The note consisted of a criticism, sweeping in character and bitter in phrase, of the whole plan. It concluded with a demand that the Army Group commanders should be convoked for consultation, especially the one charged with the attack, General Micheler. Coming on top of other representations, it led to the Conference of Compiègne, which took place next day.

The conference was a formal Council of War, provided for in French regulations but never summoned hitherto in the course of the War.³ It could be justified only by a most serious emergency, because from its very nature it implied a doubt whether the Commander-in-Chief retained the confidence of his Government. There took part in it the President of the Republic, the President of the Council, the Ministers of War, of Marine (Admiral Lacaze) and of Munitions (M. Thomas), General Nivelle, and the four Army Group commanders, Generals de Castelnau, Pétain, Franchet d'Espérey and Micheler.

If a similar weakness in conferences, especially when hastily convened, had not often enough been observed, it would appear astonishing that an assembly of men of such great ability and experience should have met and parted without ever reaching the core of the problem in front of them. It must be added that this stricture does not apply

¹ When both French and Germans reduced their divisions from four to three regiments—a process which was not to be completed in the French Army for more than a year—they abolished one of the two brigade staffs, but retained one in direct command of the infantry. The Germans even continued the use of a brigade number for this headquarters. In the case of the French Army, however, it was known as that of the Commandant d'Infanterie Divisionnaire, shortened in practice to C.I.D.

² Herbillon, "Le Général Alfred Micheler", p. 164. The importance attributed to the note is recognized by F.O.A. (v. (i.), p. 562), but it is not there reproduced. It is given almost in full by Jean de Pierrefeu in "L'Offensive du 16 Avril", p. 61.

³ M. Millerand, then Minister of War, had presided for a short time over a conference of Army Group commanders at Chantilly on 11th August 1915, when the subject of the autumn offensive was discussed.

to the four Army Group commanders, who could only answer the questions put to them.¹

M. Painlevé, called upon by the President of the Republic, repeated his arguments about the Russian Revolution and the prospect of American intervention. He went on to declare that an offensive conducted in such a manner that the Army did not suffer considerable losses, or losses disproportionate to the results, was the solution of the problem. In his words there was evidently a suggestion that the offensive should be postponed; for in his reply General Nivelle dwelt on this consideration and vigorously combated it. As to deliberately limiting the extent of the advance, he declared that that was unthinkable, but this did not mean that he intended to throw all his available forces without reflection, in one rush, into the battle.

The Army Group commanders were then called upon for their views, General Nivelle remarking that he had no objection, since there would be no abrogation of discipline if they were questioned in his presence—a home thrust indeed. General Micheler considered that the first and second hostile positions would be taken, but could not answer for the rupture of the front. General Pétain declared that he was in favour of a limited attack with the object of capturing the first and second positions. The replies of Generals Franchet d'Espérey and de Castelnau need not concern us. Neither was taking part in the main offensive, and the latter had only recently returned from Russia.

M. Poincaré summed up by stating that there were three solutions: to remain on the defensive, which everyone disliked; to engage all available forces in a decisive battle until they were used up; to undertake an attack followed by the prudent employment of the reserves if the hostile front were broken, and to stop if it were not. The third solution should in his view be adopted.

At this point General Nivelle stated that in so grave an issue personalities must not be allowed to count, and that in order to allow a decision to be taken without regard to them he would resign his post. The Ministers hastily refused even to take note of his words, and assured him of

¹ The first weakness was the failure to keep any minutes, General Nivelle's senior staff officers having been requested to withdraw. The proceedings can therefore only be reconstructed from the evidence given to General Brugère's committee of enquiry, several months later. Neither evidence nor findings have ever been published in full, but they are frequently drawn upon by the official historians and several unofficial writers.

their confidence in his character and talents. The emotion of the moment seems to have prevented the conference from pursuing the matter further, so, after deciding that unfavourable conditions as regards weather would justify some postponement of the attack, it broke up. The one vital question, whether the plans were suitable to the needs of the moment and the resources of the country, had not been answered or even squarely put. The Army Group commanders returned home, puzzled, and General Nivelle, assured of the Government's complete confidence—which he had good cause to fear he did not actually possess—decided after some reflection not to press his intention to resign. Quite apart from his plan, he has been reproached with errors of judgement after battle had been engaged. Even if it can be proved that his judgement became unbalanced, it must be admitted that his mind had been, and was to be, subjected to a strain greater than even a commander entrusted with his country's armies commonly has to bear.

He had now to face a piece of bad news. On the 4th April, after a violent artillery bombardment, the Germans launched an attack on a front of three and a half miles, with their right on Sapigneul, just south of the Aisne. On the greater part of this front they attained the Aisne—Marne Canal, 700 yards behind the French line in the centre of the attack. Counter-attacks gradually recovered the lost ground, until on the 12th almost the whole of it was again in French hands. Owing to the confusion following the German assault, it was not until the 6th April that the Fifth Army commander, General Mazel, was informed that a company commander of the 3rd Zouaves had handed to a sergeant the battalion plan of attack to take to the rear, and that the sergeant was missing. The plan gave general indications of the attack of the whole Army, with particular reference to Fort Brimont. General Nivelle received this information on the 7th, two days before the launch of the British offensive. He decided that the operations must take their course.¹

The Germans had in fact captured the plans, which gave them valuable information, including the fact that a veritable break-through was intended by the French. Yet they had known for long that a big operation was brewing. Of this the order captured in the affair of Maisons de Champagne on the 15th February had been the first

¹ F.O.A. v. (i.), p. 587.

indication.¹ The French had on the whole concealed their preparations well, keeping the bulk of the newly assembled heavy artillery silent until the first days of April; but fresh railways, roads, aerodromes and camps had not escaped notice. The Germans had already taken adequate counter-measures.

In the first place, as already stated, the German Crown Prince was instructed by O.H.L. to take over the *Seventh Army*, with right flank on the Oise, so as to have all the threatened front under one command.² With the completion of the Siegfried-Stellung, or Hindenburg Line, labour was transferred to another great retrenchment, the Hunding-Stellung, extending from La Fère, through Crécý (eight miles north of Laon) to Rethel, continued by the Brunhild-Stellung to north of Verdun. The work in the forward area, for the purpose of which 20 fortress labour battalions were put at the disposal of the Crown Prince on the 23rd February, was even more important. It converted the threatened front, as General Micheler noted, from a slenderly fortified zone to an exceptionally strong one.³ Fresh divisions were brought in, from the "pool" created by the withdrawal; the heavy artillery was reinforced; large reserves of munitions were amassed. The Crown Prince established at Sedan a Senior Officers' School—similar to that of Prince Rupprecht's Army Group at Valenciennes—for instruction in the new principles of the "Abwehrschlacht", or defensive battle. Some training of the troops was also possible, and the pause afforded by the withdrawal had notably improved their morale. To cope with the increased forces at the disposal of the Imperial Crown Prince the headquarters of the *First Army* (General Fritz von Below), made available by the contraction of the Somme front, was allotted a sector—from the Aisne at Berry au Bac to the Suippes—between the *Seventh* and *Third Armies*, though General von Below did not assume command until the very day of the French attack. The counter-attack divisions took up their stations in accordance with the new scheme in the first days of April. All was then ready, and on the threatened front the Germans had 21 divisions in front line, with 17 in

¹ See p. 115.

² See p. 114.

³ It is not possible to discuss here the natural features of the country. These are described in "1914" Vol. I., and more fully in "1918" Vol. III. By nature it was already well adapted for defence, with magnificent shelter for supports in the caves, locally known as *creutes*, to be found near the villages in all the deeper valleys.

reserve, at the disposal of the Armies, the Army Group, or O.H.L., against 53 French divisions. The considerable measure of strategic surprise affected by the British in Artois was not obtained by the French on the Aisne and in Champagne.

In his final instructions, issued on the 4th April, General Nivelle once again emphasized the nature of the offensive as he conceived it. The object was the destruction of the main body of the hostile forces on the Western Front, to be attained by two phases : a battle in which the attackers were to break the opposing front, and then defeat the enemy's reserves ; a period of exploitation in which all available Allied forces would take part.

He then outlined the rôle of each force. In the preliminary phase the British would break the hostile front between Givenchy¹ and Quéant, and then push their reserves in the direction of Cambrai and Douai ; the G.A.N. would launch attacks west and south of St. Quentin ; the G.A.R. would carry out its main rôle in the manner previously laid down, but, in view of the enemy's retirement to the Hindenburg Line, its attacks would develop chiefly in the directions of Guise, Vervins, and Hirson, that is, well east of St. Quentin, whereas before the German retirement St. Quentin had been the direction projected for the main advance ; in the G.A.C. the French Fourth Army would attack west of the Suippes, then cross the river and prepare to move on Vouziers, on the Aisne, that is, in the direction of Mezières.

Then would follow the phase of exploitation. In this the British Armies would continue their offensive in the general direction of Valenciennes, the Second Army on their left flank debouching from the region of Ypres in touch with the Belgian Army ; the Belgian Army would break the enemy's front at Dixmude and press forward as rapidly as possible on Roulers and Ghent, while on its left the French XXXVI. Corps attacked on the coast in the direction of Ostend and Bruges ; the G.A.N. would have as its first objective the railway lines radiating from Hirson towards Cambrai, Valenciennes, and Maubeuge ; the G.A.R. and G.A.C. would first clear the whole bend of the Aisne, then obtain possession of the region between the Meuse at Mezières and Oise at Guise.

The British attack was to take place on the 8th April

¹ Givenchy en Gohelle, south-west of Lens, is meant, not the Givenchy on the La Bassée canal, better known to the British Expeditionary Force.

and that of the G.A.R. on the 12th. In dealing with the British operations we have noted that the British attack was postponed for 24, and that of the G.A.R. for 48 hours, until the 14th.¹ The bad visibility which hindered ground observation of the artillery fire and aerial reconnaissance led to two further postponements, each of 24 hours, on the part of the French. On the 13th April it was finally decided that the attack of the G.A.R. should be launched on the 16th and that of the G.A.C. next day. On many parts of the front, however, it appeared that the breaches made in the wire defences were not complete or had been repaired, and it was evident to the most optimistic that the infantry had a heavy task before it.

THE OPERATIONS

On the front of the Fifth Army (General Mazel) there were five corps, with twelve divisions and two Russian brigades in first line and five divisions in Army or corps reserve. The XXXVIII. Corps, covering Reims, was almost inactive. Its left division only was engaged, for the purpose of forming a hinge for the attack on Brimont, which was to be captured by the VII. Corps by an enveloping attack. The XXXII. Corps, astride the Aisne, was to be supported on its left in the plain between the Aisne and the Miette brook by five groups of tanks totalling 80; the V. Corps, which also had in front of it suitable ground between the Miette and the eastern end of the Chemin des Dames ridge, disposed of three groups of 48 tanks. It may appear curious that the British, the inventors and pioneers of the tank, put into the field at Arras only one-third of the number of tanks employed by the French on the Aisne. It may be said that the British were still feeling their way by experiment, whereas the French had placed very large orders for an untried weapon. The slow Schneider tank used on this occasion proved very far from satisfactory.

The attack was launched at 6. A.M. The morning was misty with an overclouded sky. Almost from the first it was evident that the preparation had been incomplete. The German barrage was seldom heavy, but the machine guns were largely unsubdued and soon began to take heavy toll of the French infantry, who were in general quickly thinned out, discouraged and exhausted. The Germans launched local counter-attacks promptly, and, where any

¹ See p. 182.

considerable French success had been gained, resorted to big, carefully prepared counter-attacks later on in the day.

On the right Courcy was captured, but the advance came to a halt under heavy fire on the Aisne—Marne Canal. Further north the canal was crossed, and Bermericourt fell after hard fighting. From that point up to the Aisne the attack was frankly a failure, and, indeed, immediately south of the river the infantry fell back to the original line. North of the Aisne, affairs went very much better. Between the Aisne and the Miette the celebrated 42nd Division and its left-hand neighbour, the 69th, reached the enemy's second position, the maximum progress north of Berry being about two and a half miles. The tanks which were to have carried on the infantry to the third German position were late. The infantry was too fatigued and depleted in numbers to follow them, and there was a veritable holocaust among the tanks, which lost half their numbers in the enemy's lines. Actually, this section of the tanks accomplished remarkably good service, remaining master of the battlefield well ahead of the infantry for several hours. Their fire was also efficacious in assisting to beat off a heavy German counter-attack in this region. No ground was lost here, whereas further south Bermericourt was recovered by the enemy. The consequences of the German attack at Sapigneul were indeed proving unfortunate to the French. Apart altogether from the capture of the plans, the fighting there had so exhausted the French 37th Division south of the Aisne that, almost alone on the whole front, it failed completely. In consequence, the German artillery facing the 37th was able to neglect it and to fire into the flanks of the neighbouring divisions, to check their promising advance, and to play a great part in the destruction of the tanks north of the Aisne. But for this incident the French Fifth Army might have won an unprecedented success between Loivre and Juvincourt.

The right of the V. Corps made progress as good as the left of the XXXII. and entered the German second position south of Juvincourt. The tanks operating west of the Miette, however, suffered a catastrophic reverse. Issuing from the Bois de Beau Marais, they were right under the eyes of German observers on the east end of the Chemin des Dames ridge about Craonne, which was still in the hands of the enemy, and became ideal targets to his artillery. Few penetrated far into the German lines; 23 were destroyed by fire behind the French front; and at

evening only about ten regained the cover of the wood. The left of the V. Corps was held up by the Bois des Boches and the hamlet of la Ville aux Bois, and on the Chemin des Dames ridge even less progress was made by the I. Corps. At the most, all that remained in French hands by the evening was the German support line, two or three hundred yards behind the front.

The losses had been very heavy, and hardly a division was capable of another serious effort. Where the attack had been most successful, it was still short of the line which it was to have reached by 9.30 A.M. On the other hand, a very large haul of prisoners, over 7,000, had been captured.

The Sixth Army (General Mangin) had eight divisions in first line and nine in reserve. The right wing, between Oulches and Missy, was, owing to the configuration of the German defences, at right angles to the left, between Missy and Landricourt. The attack was launched on only about half this extended front, the main assault being that between Oulches and Soupir. Here it was carried out by the II. Colonial, XX., and VI. Corps. Six hours after Zero, by which time the II. Colonial and XX. Corps were expected to have progressed three and a half miles, the XI. Corps was to come in between them in the valley of the Ailette, whence the advance was to be continued to the heights above the valley. At 9 A.M. a subsidiary attack was to be launched from the Laffaux—Vauxaillon front in an easterly direction. Thus the formidable salient in the German lines, at the apex of which stood the Fort de Condé, was not to be attacked directly but pinched out by converging movements from south and west. No tanks were allotted to General Mangin.

On the whole, the Sixth Army had less success than the Fifth. The advance of the II. Colonial Corps was at most about half a mile and was over within an hour. The XX. Corps between Vendresse and the Oise—Aisne Canal did very much better. On the right wing the 153rd Division, commanded by an able soldier very well known to the British Army, General Pellé, launched a second attack after its first had been checked, and finally reached the Chemin des Dames south of Courtecon, a mile and a quarter from the starting-line. The VI. Corps made a fair amount of progress on its right, immediately west of the canal, but very little on its left. On the Laffaux front the I. Colonial Corps penetrated nowhere more than a few hundred yards into the powerful defences of the Condé-Riegel. East of

Vauxaillon the successful attack on the Mont des Singes received powerful support from the British XXIV. Heavy Artillery Group (Lieut.-Colonel C. W. Collingwood), loaned to the French for the occasion, which received warm praise from the French artillery commander.¹ The hill was, however, lost to a counter-attack. About 3,500 prisoners were captured by the Sixth Army, half the number taken by the Fifth.

The break-through had not been accomplished. At one point only, north of the Aisne, had a footing been gained in the German second position. The assault had thus been considerably less successful than that at Arras, where a large section of the second position had been captured and the third actually breached at Fampoux. Few guns had been captured, the Germans having previously moved back all their advanced batteries. Nor does it appear that the French forces felt themselves under the inspiration of a great victory, as had been the case with the British at Arras. By comparison with previous offensives, however, the gains were large and the reserves were practically untouched.

Believing that it was the German command's intention to hold on at all costs on the front of the French Sixth Army, General Nivelle ordered the Fifth to press north-eastward in the direction where most success had been gained, while the Sixth protected its left flank. As it turned out, little was accomplished by the Fifth on the 17th April, whereas the Sixth, keeping up steady pressure even after the fall of darkness, brought about the most dramatic event of the battle. The enemy found himself seriously threatened by simultaneous attacks from south and west. He suddenly decided to abandon the whole great triangle Braye—Condé—Laffaux, and withdraw behind rear guards to the Hindenburg Line, running from Laffaux Mill to the Chemin des Dames, and following it to the original front system near Courtecon. This was a genuine French success; for though the retirement was voluntary, it was dictated by fear and very hurried. Many guns, a proportion of them undamaged, and vast stocks of

¹ The XXIV. H.A.G. was made up for these operations of the 160th, 176th, 207th, and 255th Siege Batteries, all of 6-inch howitzers. It was sent down by train from the Second Army area and emplaced its batteries in the deep valley between Terny Sorny and Margival. Two of its batteries were engaged on 7th April in support of an unsuccessful minor operation against Laffaux. It remained in action until the night of 8th May, and then set out on its return journey to the Second Army, to take part in the Flanders offensive.

munitions were captured. The maximum advance, after the French had closed up on the 20th to the new German position, was four miles.

The 17th April was the date of the important subsidiary operation in Champagne, carried out by the Fourth Army (General Anthoine), the left Army of the G.A.C. From right to left on the front of attack there were the 24th Division, which had only to form the hinge of the advance on the right bank of the Suippes; from the Suippes to Prosnes, the XVII. Corps (Moroccan, 33rd and 45th Divisions); and from Prosnes to Prunay, the VIII. Corps (34th and 16th Divisions); with two divisions in reserve.

The assault was launched at 4.45 A.M. in cold rain, which occasionally turned to snow. The results were very similar to those of the G.A.R., but on the whole rather better; though there was no progress equal to that north of Berry au Bac, and no prospect of a break-through. The hinge east of the Suippes was successfully opened and that part of Aubérive east of the river retained in face of counter-attacks. The Moroccan Division, commanded by General Degoutte, failed on the right, west of the river, but on its left stormed the formidable Mont sans Nom. North-east of this height the advance extended to a distance of a mile and a half. By the 20th further considerable gains, including Mont Haut, had been made.

It is not proposed to describe in any detail the further progress of the offensive, which, indeed, can be followed only on large-scale maps. The French had sought a break-through, and they had completely failed to achieve it. From other points of view they had gained considerable advantages. By the 20th April they had in their hands over 20,000 prisoners and 147 guns;¹ the railway from Soissons to Reims was freed; the enemy had been driven out of the Aisne valley west of the Oise—Aisne Canal; the German second position had been captured south of Juvincourt; and in Champagne some of the most important of the "monts" had been taken. The German counter-attacks, successful at the beginning, were becoming less and less so as time went on. In particular, a great effort made on the 19th against the Fourth Army, when three divisions were thrown in between Nauroy and Moronvilliers, failed completely.²

¹ Fourth Army, 3,550 prisoners, 27 guns; Fifth Army, 11,000 prisoners, 40 guns; Sixth Army, 5,580 prisoners, 80 guns.

² Schwarte, III. (3), p. 187.

The German command, intensely relieved because of the French failure to effect a rupture, proclaimed that a glorious victory had been won, but the troops were under no such impression. Every German front line division had lost ground, some a great deal of ground, and every one had been cut up. Yet, such was the shortage of reserves that these exhausted skeleton divisions, after relief by the counter-attack divisions—themselves by now often severely handled—had in many cases to take their places in second line.¹

The French losses had indeed been very heavy, totalling 96,125 up to the 25th April, and the break-down of the medical services had added to the dolorous impression made upon the troops, who saw the forward zone choked with wounded awaiting attention.² But the German losses were also, so far as can be estimated, higher than those of any previous offensive. They are not available for this period, or, indeed, for the Battles of the Aisne and Champagne. There are, however, some instructive figures for the losses on both sides during the period of four months, April to July, covering these battles and a series of local engagements which succeeded them on both fronts. Those of the German forces facing French and Belgian troops in the Western theatre total 238,310 ; those of the French Armies as a whole, 279,000. From the French total there must be deducted at least 5,000 for casualties in Macedonia, where there were somewhat costly operations during the month of May.³ Obviously the bulk of these losses were incurred by both sides in the spring offensives, and it may be taken that the French and German casualties in these battles were in the same proportion to the totals. Hitherto, it has been found that the official estimates of German casualties prove far too low when worked out more carefully in their official histories. But, even if we disregard that point completely and take it that there were 238 German casualties to 274

¹ Schwarte III. (3), p. 186.

² The corrected figures furnished by General Nivelle were :—

Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total
15,589	60,036	20,500	96,125

These figures have been disputed, but they are accepted by the French Historical Service (F.O.A. v. (i.), Annexe 1917). They include the losses suffered by the two Russian brigades engaged. A large proportion of the missing were undoubtedly killed.

³ The German losses are from Mr. Winston Churchill's "World Crisis" (Abridged Edition, p. 823), and were supplied to him by the *Reichsarchiv*. The French are from an official post-war return.

French, then the German losses in the Aisne—Champagne offensive up to the 25th April would be 83,000 to the French 96,000.

All the success gained was, however, almost nullified by the terrible shock of disappointment. It had been taken for granted that if the attempt to break through the German front failed, then the whole operation must be regarded as a failure. There were other factors against a continuance of the offensive on its present scale, in particular, a serious shortage of shells, which had been used in enormous quantities and often wastefully; but the chief were the unfortunate reaction upon the troops, and, still more important, the disillusionment, horror, and anger in French political circles, which called insistently for a scapegoat, it might almost be said, for a herd of scapegoats.

Thenceforward General Nivelle was bound hand and foot. He could scarcely direct that an operation should be studied, still less order one to be executed, without being cross-questioned about it or even forbidden to undertake it. He was constantly called away from his headquarters when his presence there was urgently required. Finally, it was reported to the Government that he had become depressed and ceased to command.¹

Yet the offensive was continued for a considerable period. General Nivelle's first intention was, in fact, that the original object, a rupture of the front, should still be pursued. For this purpose he decided to bring the Tenth Army into line between the Fifth and Sixth, from Berry au Bac to the Chemin des Dames north of Oulches. On the 21st April, however, General Micheler suggested a modification of the orders to this effect which had already been issued. He would prefer, he said, to capture the western end of the Chemin des Dames ridge and consolidate the whole of it; subsequently he would capture the dominating hill-fortress of Brimont, which overlooks the plain in all directions, while the Fourth Army might well co-operate by attacking the almost equally important fortified height of Berru. In principle General Nivelle accepted this advice. The aspect of the offensive was entirely changed. It had now become a limited operation to secure the whole of the Chemin des Dames ridge and disengage Reims.

The Tenth Army (General Duchêne) was duly interposed between the Fifth and Sixth on the 21st April, and

¹ Poincaré, "L'Année trouble", p. 137.

three days later the Sixth was transferred from G.A.R. to the G.A.N., coming under the orders of General Franchet d'Espérey. On the 29th, as already recorded, General Pétain was appointed Chief of the General Staff. The functions of that office had hitherto been very restricted, but those of General Pétain were made much more important. The office was now modelled as closely as possible upon that of the British C.I.G.S., so that its holder became the "military counsellor" of the French Government. General Pétain was replaced in command of the G.A.C. by General Fayolle. Simultaneously, the axe fell for the first time. General Pont, the Major-General of the Armies, was superseded by General Débeney, who came from the command of the Seventh Army in Alsace. Its next blow was a more resounding one. The operations had meanwhile been of a local nature; now a further series of major attacks was impending, to be carried out on the 4th and 5th May. In the midst of his preparations for the Sixth Army's participation in these, on the 2nd May, General Mangin was removed from his command and replaced by General Maistre.

The operations of the 4th and 5th May were to have included an attack on Brimont, the possession of which would have been of incalculable value to the French. This had, however, been "postponed" by the Government at the instance of M. Painlevé, and actually never took place. The incident may be said to have given the *coup de grâce* to the authority of the Commander-in-Chief. The attacks of the Fourth and Fifth Armies had only a very limited amount of success. The Tenth, however, if its gains were narrow, did fine work in completing the capture of the Californie plateau on the Chemin des Dames ridge. The Sixth achieved what, at this stage and in these circumstances, could only be regarded as a remarkable triumph. It captured the Hindenburg Line on a front of two and a half miles on the Chemin des Dames ridge and bit deeply into it in the salient opposite Laffaux. When the action died down the following evening the attackers had reached the outskirts of Allemant, and upwards of 4,000 prisoners had been added to the Sixth Army's haul. This marked almost the end of the offensive except on the Fourth Army front, where some further progress, including the capture of Mont Cornillet, was afterwards made. The total captures up to the 10th May numbered approximately 28,500 prisoners and 187 guns.

On the 4th and 5th May the Franco-British Conference was held in Paris, General Nivelle, like Sir Douglas Haig, being thus compelled to be absent from his headquarters during the last big battle. As has been stated in dealing with this conference from the British point of view, a policy of attacks with limited objectives was agreed upon. Immediately afterwards, on the 8th May, the G.A.R. was broken up, the Tenth Army being transferred to the G.A.N. and the Fifth to the G.A.C. General Micheler escaped the fate apparently overhanging him and was given command of the First Army, made vacant by the promotion of General Fayolle. On the 23rd May he was transferred to the Fifth Army in supersession of General Mazel, another victim. Meanwhile the Government had at last decided to remove General Nivelle. By a decree of the 15th May, General Pétain was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the North and North-East. His place as Chief of the General Staff was taken over by General Foch, who had returned from his mission to Italy.¹ General Nivelle was nominated commander of a Group of Armies, but on the 29th June the appointment was cancelled at the instance of General Pétain, who stated that no vacancy was likely to occur for a considerable time. After the advent to power of M. Clemenceau, General Nivelle was appointed Commander-in-Chief in Northern Africa, which was, at all events, the most honourable and responsible military post outside the theatres of war.

His projects for future operations, notably the Franco-British attack on the Hindenburg Line,² were put aside. In accordance with the decisions of the Paris Conference the French had to relieve the British as far north as the Omignon, a front of two divisions, with one in reserve. This was carried out by the 20th May. A very much more serious preoccupation of the new Commander-in-Chief was the series of mutinies which broke out in the French Armies.

The defeatist campaign which was in progress in the interior of the country has already been mentioned.³ General Nivelle had urgently demanded its repression and pointed out the grave danger that it would affect the troops, some of whom when on leave took part in pacifist meetings, while others were in receipt of treasonable journals and pamphlets. The Ministry of the Interior under M. Malvy gave the Commander-in-Chief little support. Apart from this propaganda, the heavy losses and the

¹ See p. 483, f.n.

² See p. 410.

³ See p. 25.

failure to achieve more extensive results in the Battles of the Somme had created a critical spirit in the Army. Nevertheless, morale was completely restored by the prospect of the offensive, and the traditional courage and dash of the French infantry appeared at their best when it was launched. Disappointment with the results had, however, a disastrous effect. The hasty changes of plan and cancellation of orders created an atmosphere of uneasiness. Failure to treat and evacuate with due speed the large numbers of wounded added to the exasperation and depression. At the same time the defeatists, some of whom were afterwards found to be in German pay, redoubled their efforts and came further into the open. A series of wild rumours and exaggerations, often spread by people with no treacherous intentions, increased the evil.

The first serious manifestation of unrest occurred on the 29th April, not in the G.A.R. but in a battalion of the G.A.C. which had taken part in an attack on the Monts de Champagne.¹ There appears, however, to be good authority for the statement that the resumption of the offensive checked the spread of the malady, which did not become really serious till this was over.² At all events, of the 119 cases of collective indiscipline recorded, eighty took place between the 25th May and the 10th June. Of these 119 cases, 110 were considered grave. They were distributed among almost half that number of divisions, namely, 54.

Typical acts of indiscipline were manifestations against the War, stone-throwing, and window-breaking, with some incendiarism. Refusal to go into the line was common, but attacks on officers were very rare.

Starting a little later, there were grave incidents in the leave trains, the first taking place at Troyes on the 19th May and the critical period being from the 6th to the 27th June. There were displays of red flags, singing of revolutionary songs, uncoupling of engines, mishandling of military police and railway servants. It was estimated that more than half the leave men returned in a state of drunkenness.

General Pétain found that the weapon confided to him by the nation was bending in his hand. "The confidence of the Army in its chiefs, in the Government, and in itself was undermined."

He had first to suppress disorder, which he did with a

¹ The chief authority for this summary is F.O.A. v. (ii.), Chapter IV.

² Mermeix, "Nivelle et Painlevé", p. 170.

mixture of firmness and tact, having, it would appear, no difficulty in finding troops for the purpose. Out of 412 death penalties pronounced between May and October, only 55 men were shot, and a proportion of these for crimes other than acts of mutiny. He made personal visits to many units, assembled the officers, addressed them, and questioned them about their problems. He enjoined subordinate commanders to do the like. He realized that it was above all necessary to revive confidence in the command by operations giving the maximum results at the minimum cost. To undertake them immediately was impossible, as the Army had not sufficiently recovered. Indeed, his projects had to be postponed, and the French had to submit to an irritating and costly bickering on the Chemin des Dames, where the steepness of both the forward and reverse slopes was such that their field gun, with its flat trajectory, gave them little protection. They lost there several observation posts which had been very hardly won. Later on the successes in Flanders and at Verdun, and especially the Battle of Malmaison, responded to Pétain's design and contributed to his efforts.

The chief cause of unrest was lack of leave; indeed, many of the mutinies had no other origin than to protest against the long closing down of leave during the operations. The aim of General Pétain was to secure to every soldier seven days' leave—later increased to ten days'—every four months. The normal number on leave at any one time was to be raised to 25 per cent., and when formations were drawn out after a battle it might be increased to 50 per cent. This was a state of affairs in striking contrast to that prevailing in the British Army, where leave was always severely limited by the inability of the Admiralty to provide the necessary boats. It had also at times a serious effect upon operations. When prior to the Battles of Ypres Sir Douglas Haig caused enquiries to be made as to why the French Army under General Anthoine could not be ready in time, he discovered that so many men were on leave that there was not enough labour to prepare battery positions.

Other measures taken by General Pétain were the removal of bad characters who were serving sentences in the ranks; the initiation of collective awards, the *fourragères* of the Croix de Guerre, Médaille Militaire, and Légion d'Honneur; repression of propaganda from the rear; improvement of cooking; repression of drunkenness

by cutting down the sale of wine in the Zone of the Armies, and crediting to the accounts of the higher-paid men a large proportion of their pay ; provision of safer, more comfortable and quieter quarters for reserves, which was rendered possible by the development of mechanical transport since 1914 ; improvement of travelling conditions for men on leave, especially by the establishment of canteens at railheads and important junctions ; and collaboration with the Press and the Government.

The results of these measures and of the victorious engagements of the year were excellent, but they did not wholly eradicate the evil. This was proved by a minor and brief recurrence of trouble in November, due to the Pope's Note in favour of peace and the Socialist conference in Stockholm.

The recovery of the French Army under General Pétaïn was all the more remarkable because the malady was so widespread and the difficulties of a cure in time of war were so great. Probably few commanders would have achieved as much as he did. Whether or not the cure was complete is, however, not an easy question to answer. Some British observers in a good position to judge considered that not until the tide of victory had definitely turned in 1918 did the French Army as a whole regain complete confidence in itself. Others, on the contrary, hold that the effect of the mutinies has been somewhat exaggerated and that General Pétaïn, whose policy was to take no action on a large scale until the arrival of the American Armies, did nothing to belittle them in his conversations with Sir Douglas Haig.¹ However that may be, they were to have an important effect upon the events of the rest of 1917.

The causes of the comparative failure of the offensive of General Nivelle are clear enough. In fact, we may pass by all the subsidiary reasons and concentrate on one : absence of surprise. That at best General Nivelle would have achieved all he hoped is improbable ; but the measure

¹ It is of interest to note that General Micheler, in letters which are contemporary and written without reserve, while insisting on the gravity of the situation, attributed it chiefly to propaganda from the rear. He gives vivid pictures of the demoralization of the Russian brigades, but never suggests that conditions were in any way similar in French formations. (Colonel E. Herbillon : " Le Général Alfred Micheler ", Chapter XIV.) It may be added that neither the First Army, which he commanded for a fortnight in May, nor the Fifth, which he later took over, was among the more gravely affected. The three worst were the Sixth (Mangin, then Maistre), Fourth (Anthoine), and Tenth (Duchêne), in that order.

of success might well have been vastly greater, and the Germans might have been dealt a terrific blow, had they not been forewarned and forearmed at every point.

Complete strategic surprise was scarcely possible until shooting by the map had been perfected. Yet at Arras, in country less suitable for concealment than the wooded and broken banks of the Aisne, the British had obtained tactical surprise to a large extent and even strategic surprise in some degree—for it is surely legitimate to speak of a strategic surprise when the enemy is caught with his reserves out of striking distance. In this the French failed wholly. In consequence the Germans, aided by the long delay in launching the offensive, were able not only to improve their defences and increase their forces, but also to prepare at leisure to fight their "defensive battle" on the new lines. The scheme worked successfully here, though the number of prisoners captured on the first day is evidence that, despite the experience of Arras, there were still too many troops in the forward zone of defence. The French preparations, on the whole, were made unobtrusively, but too much talk was allowed and too many people were in the secret. On top of that came deplorable imprudence in the circulation of orders and in permitting even battalions to work out their plans of attack—plans which dealt, quite unnecessarily, with the whole scheme of the Army to which they belonged—while they were actually holding the front line. The Affair of Maisons de Champagne, so far back as mid-February, put the Germans on their guard; the Combat of Sapigneul on the 4th April enabled them to dot all the *i*'s and cross all the *t*'s. "That quality "in the commander", remarks a German critic, "which "encourages him to carry through unmoved the plan on "which he has once made up his mind is assuredly among "the most precious. Yet there comes a limit beyond "which refusal to take account of circumstances obliterates leadership, leaving behind only rash presumption. "That limit General Nivelle reached and overstepped."¹

¹ Ein Generalstäbler (Hans Ritter), "Kritik des Weltkrieges", p. 188.

CHAPTER XX

THE BATTLES OF ARRAS 1917 : THE LAST STAGES, 5TH-24TH MAY

(Maps 3, 8 ; Sketches 19, 23)

THIRD ARMY

AFTER the Paris Conference the British Commander-in-Chief put behind him all doubts as to his future course of action. He now had an assurance that, while the British were to assume responsibility for the main operations during the summer, the French would assist them by vigorous attacks and by taking over a portion of their front.¹ He had definitely decided that these main operations would have for object the clearance of the Belgian coast.

It was not in his power to launch this offensive at once ; nor was there in his view any need to do so. The capture of the Messines Ridge was essential to the main operations, which were to take place east and north of Ypres, and it could be carried out separately. In front of the ridge, too, preparations were already well advanced. On the 7th May Sir Douglas Haig informed the Army commanders at a meeting held at Doullens that he hoped to capture the Messines Ridge that day month.

The campaign would thus have two phases : first, the capture of the Messines Ridge, and secondly, the "northern operations", to be begun some weeks later. It was the Commander-in-Chief's intention to transfer to the north in the first instance only enough troops for the Messines operation. Three divisions, the 11th, 24th, and 4th Australian—the equivalent of those relieved by the French when they took over the front to the Omignon—would be required. Half the heavy artillery at the disposal of the Fifth Army would be moved gradually,

¹ See p. 429.

and one-third of that with the First and Third Armies in two echelons. As regards field artillery, fifteen Army field brigades were to be sent from the First, five from the Third, and three from the Fifth, in addition to divisional artillery. The XIV. Corps, in G.H.Q. reserve, composed of the Guards, 1st, 8th and 32nd Divisions, was to be stationed in rear of the Second Army, and all the divisional artillery would, if necessary, be available to assist in the capture of the ridge. Another G.H.Q. reserve would be formed further south, composed of some of the best divisions which had been engaged in the Arras or Bullecourt fighting, the 15th, 29th, 37th, 51st, and 1st and 2nd Australian. These troops would not be required for the Messines attack, but would be given time for rest, training, and the absorption of their drafts. The headquarters of the II. Corps, which had been out of the line for some time, was also to move up to Flanders, taking with it another of the Arras divisions, the 30th. The Cavalry Corps, less one division, was to be put at the disposal of the Fourth Army, and was to be available to hold a portion of the line, thus giving greater opportunities for training to the infantry.

All the Army boundaries would be affected. The French were relieving the Fourth Army up to the Omignon immediately, and before the main operations began Sir Douglas Haig hoped they would take over as far north as Havrincourt.¹ On the 31st May the Third Army was to take over all troops on the front of the Fifth. General Gough was then to proceed to Flanders, preparatory to assuming command of the left wing of the Second Army. The First Army was to take over the front of the Second up to the Lys. In June the XV. Corps was to relieve the French on the coast.²

Meanwhile Sir Douglas Haig desired that active operations should continue on the battle front from Bullecourt to north of the Souchez. The task allotted to the First and Third Army commanders was neither agreeable nor easy. They had to maintain the fight with tired, much-battered divisions, for which few drafts would be available, because the flow of reinforcements was for the time being directed

¹ As will appear, the further relief was not carried out. General Pétain preferred to provide a small Army to take part in the Flanders offensive.

² Sir Douglas Haig did not at this moment reveal his intention to place the commander of the Fourth Army, General Rawlinson, in control of operations in the Nieuport sector, the Third Army then taking over the front of the Fourth in addition to that of the Fifth. Meanwhile the XV. Corps was to be directly under G.H.Q.

to the divisions preparing for the Flanders offensive. As May wore on, too, their resources in artillery would decrease. Their attacks would therefore have to be comparatively small operations with limited objectives. By means of care in the selection of these and thorough preparation, it was hoped to keep up steady pressure and so avoid revealing to the enemy that the battle was drawing to its close.

The main interest of the British military operations now begins to shift to Flanders. It is not to be expected that attacks of the type mentioned above should in general be important or instructive enough to be profitably recorded in detail. The majority were not, and these, carried out in conditions by now thoroughly familiar to the reader, will be dealt with briefly. It happens, however, that one episode involving a brilliant local offensive immediately north of the Scarpe and a resolute defence of its gains, stands in quite a different category. To it more space must be allotted; indeed, it merits more than can be afforded.

The moves of artillery did not begin at once, and General Allenby suffered from no shortage for his earlier operations.¹ Later on, he had to shift artillery from one corps to another for local attacks.

It was evident that in the present circumstances no attack with deep objectives in view was likely to be profitable. The best chances of local success seemed to lie in attempting, even at this stage, to bring about tactical surprise by attacking at unaccustomed hours while creating deception by means of "Chinese attacks" elsewhere. The most important of these operations was entrusted to the 4th Division of the XVII. Corps.

Colonel W. M. St. G. Kirke, G.S.O.1 of the division, suggested to Major-General Lambton that the previous failures to capture the Chemical Works were due, partly to insufficient artillery preparation, partly to the distance of the objectives set, and partly to the absence of surprise in the attacks at dawn. Despite the trying experiences the troops had undergone, despite the fact that the division had been in line since the 30th April and had taken part in the heart-breaking operation of the 8rd May, so that the battalions were both weak and weary, he was confident

¹ He had also to send north an Army Troops Company R.E., a tunnelling company, two of the Special Brigade R.E. companies which employed Livens projectors, and one armed with 4-inch Stokes mortars. He was likewise called upon to despatch 68 heavy trench mortars without personnel.

of success. Major-General Lambton agreed, and a scheme was put up to the corps commander, Lieut.-General Fergusson.

It was proposed that the attack should be made in the evening, in the hope that the enemy would remain uncertain as to the situation until morning light. The buildings both north and south of the railway were to be subjected to several slow, methodical bombardments prior to the assault. With the assistance of the flanking divisions, the artillery barrage could be made exceptionally strong, one 18-pdr. to seven yards. It was to be further thickened by the fire of Stokes mortars. Similarly, two machine-gun companies of the 17th Division were to co-operate in the overhead barrage. Certain machine guns were to go forward with the infantry, and in order to ensure that they should be quickly dug in, parties of engineers were to accompany them.

Lieut.-General Fergusson arranged that this attack, to capture the Chemical Works, the cemetery, the château, and the station, should be launched at 7.30 p.m. on the 11th May. Two companies of the 6/Dorsetshire (50th Brigade, 17th Division) were placed under the orders of the left battalion commander of the 4th Division to capture a work north of the station cross-roads.¹ On the 12th May the left of the 4th Division and the 17th Division were to carry out a further attack with the objective of a trench running north-east from the cemetery to the railway crossing north of Rœux, and thence to the crossing-point of the Fampoux—Fresnes and Gavrelle—Plouvain roads. Rœux itself, where so much disintegration had occurred in former operations, was not to be attacked; but if all went well it would be rendered untenable. Special anti-aircraft protection was obtained for the troops of the 4th Division, who would be waiting in assembly trenches throughout the hours of daylight on the 11th. A rehearsal of the barrage was carried out, both to accustom the enemy to it and to note the nature of his counter-barrage. It was also arranged that the VI. and XIII. Corps, on either flank, should extend the barrage in order to mislead the enemy as to the frontage of the attack. Beyond ensuring co-operation, General Allenby left the details to his subordinates. He issued, however, one useful warning. In previous operations, he pointed out, the tendency had been to put off

¹ The 17th Division, last in action south of the Scarpe, was to relieve the 9th Division on 10th May.

artillery tasks from day to day in hopes of better visibility, 11 May. and the study of aeroplane photographs had led to further demands for wire-cutting or the reduction of strong points. The result had been, as he showed by means of a chart, a very considerable increase in the volume of fire just before the launch of an attack, which had undoubtedly set the enemy on his guard.

As the 4th Division could put only 2,444 infantry officers and men, exclusive of four companies of carriers, into the attack, Major-General Lambton decided to employ all his battalions in the assault, without a reserve. He attached the battalions of the 12th Brigade to the 10th and 11th, to which the attack was entrusted. The corps commander put at his disposal the 152nd Brigade, 51st Division, for employment in emergency.

Four extra field artillery brigades, two from the VI. Corps and two from the 17th Division, were to be attached to the 4th Division from half an hour before Zero on the 11th.¹ On the second day the 17th Division naturally required all its artillery and was even borrowing a brigade from the 4th, but the latter was again to have the assistance of the two brigades from the VI. Corps. The 18-pdr. barrage was to creep east at the rate of 100 yards in four minutes, firing four rounds per gun per minute—so that shells would be dropping at the amazing rate of one per minute on less than two yards of front—with a 4.5-inch howitzer barrage keeping one hundred yards ahead of it. The 18-pdrs. fired shrapnel, except in the case of certain brigades on the flanks, where the risk was too great.

The survivors of the infantry battalions were physically so exhausted that some of the battalion commanders were inclined to question their ability to carry out another operation. The prospects of the new plan appealed to them so strongly, however, that their spirits rose, and bodily fatigue was forgotten.

The troops were apparently unseen in their assembly trenches, though a German aeroplane, flying low, passed over them. When the hour came they went forward close behind the huge wall of fire, the thickest barrage any of

¹ The artillery already under the command of Br.-General F. T. Ravenhill, C.R.A. of the 4th Division, consisted of the XXIX. Brigade (4th Division), LI. Brigade (9th Division), CCLV. and CCLVI. Brigades (51st Division), and XIV. R.H.A. and XXIII. (Army) Brigades. The VI. Corps lent for the barrage the CLXII. Brigade (88rd Division) and XLVIII. (Army) Brigade; the 17th Division lent the XXXII. Brigade (4th Division) and L. Brigade (9th Division).

them had ever seen. The 10th Brigade (Br.-General A. G. Pritchard) got all its objectives, though parties of the enemy held out in buildings nearly all night. The 11th Brigade (Br.-General R. A. Berners) with the attached companies of the 6/Dorsetshire on its left was completely successful, with slight loss. Here a discovery was made of what had perhaps been the prime cause of previous failures. Some two hours after the capture of the château, men of the 1/Hampshire noticed movement at its south-east corner, and were just in time to stop a party of Germans mounting a machine gun in a concrete structure with walls six feet, and roof seven feet, in thickness. It had three embrasures for machine guns to fire in all directions with very extensive command ; for, concealed as it was amid ruins, it had been built much higher than the casemates in the Hindenburg Line. Inside were four guns. This "pill-box" type was already known in Flanders and was to become all too familiar there.

The second attack was launched at 6.30 A.M. next morning by the 11th Brigade of the 4th Division and by the 17th Division on its left. Again the 4th Division was completely successful, though on this occasion one battalion, the 1/Rifle Brigade, suffered heavily during consolidation of the captured position. The 17th Division (Major-General P. R. Robertson) was supported by the fire of nine field artillery brigades under the command of the C.R.A., Br.-General P. Wheatley.¹ On the right, the 50th Brigade (Br.-General C. Yatman) was successful on its right but not wholly so on its left.² The 10/Lancashire Fusiliers of the 52nd Brigade (Br.-General J. L. C. Clarke) failed. Here the enemy was on the alert. His aircraft had flown low over the front at dawn, and the concentration in the British trenches had evidently been reported. Consequently, his barrage, in contrast to that further south, was prompt ; and a machine gun out in the open mowed down the right and centre of the battalion. The left reached its first objective, but was driven out within half

¹ The attached artillery consisted of the following brigades : XXXII. (4th Division), L. (9th Division), CLII. and CLX. (34th Division), LII. and CCXCIII. (Army). The 4th Division on the right lent the CCLVI. (51st Division), and the 31st Division on the left lent the CCXXIII. (63rd Division) and CCCXI. (Army) Brigades.

² Private T. Dresser, 7/Green Howards, who was carrying an important message from battalion headquarters to the front-line trenches, was twice wounded on the way. Though suffering great pain, he delivered his message, reaching his destination in a state of complete exhaustion. He was awarded the V.C.

an hour. Further efforts by the 50th Brigade broke down, and the net result was an advance on a front of 600 yards north of the Fampoux—Plouvain road, on the right to a trench (Cupid Trench) which was a continuation of that captured by the 4th Division and 700 yards east of the station cross-roads. In the two attacks over 500 prisoners were captured, and the 4th Division took 25 machine guns. Several of these were brought into action and saved loss to carriers by economizing British ammunition. The casualties of the 4th Division were 28 officers and 511 other ranks; those of the 17th Division probably rather less, but they are reckoned only for the whole period that the division was in the line.

It was discovered that the 4th Division's attack had fallen mainly on the *4th Ersatz Division*. This luckless formation, from the Havrincourt area, had failed in the Lagnicourt counter-offensive, had been harassed and harried by the left wing of the Fourth Army when closing up to the Hindenburg Line, and had now been transferred to the wasps' nest of Rœux. Its losses must have been very large; for about 300 prisoners were taken from one battalion of its *362nd Regiment* and 150 from the *360th*. Further north, the stouter troops of the *6th Bavarian Reserve Division* resisted the attack with success.

The 4th Division was at once relieved by the 152nd Brigade of the 51st Division. During the night the Scotsmen occupied the western half of Rœux, and on the night of the 13th, finding the whole village evacuated, established posts on its eastern outskirts.

Throughout the 15th the enemy carried out an artillery preparation which obviously foreshadowed an attempt to recover the lost ground. All calibres up to 21-cm. were employed in what the brigade commander, Br.-General H. P. Burn, described as the heaviest hostile bombardment he had experienced in two and a half years on the Western Front. The losses of the brigade were not, however, heavy, the brigadier having disposed his troops as far as possible from buildings, especially the Chemical Works. The reliefs ordered to take place that night, which included the taking over from the 17th Division of its gains on the 12th, were not cancelled.

At 3.45 A.M. on the 16th the Germans advanced to the 16 May. assault behind a heavy barrage. On the right, where the 1/6th Gordon Highlanders was relieving the 1/5th Seaforth, they overran the posts east of Rœux, but a party which

advanced to the centre of the village and was at first mistaken for British troops returning after relief, was recognized in time and dispersed with loss. South of Rœux the posts all held their ground even though the enemy passed between them. Subsequent attempts to advance by the German infantry were routed, largely by the fire of Vickers machine guns, which Br.-General Burn had posted further forward than was the custom at this period. The whole position was finally restored, except that the posts east of Rœux were not re-established that day.

Further north affairs were more serious. The enemy broke through astride the railway, captured the Chemical Works, and penetrated 300 yards west of the station. The party north of the railway was, however, counter-attacked by Lieut.-Colonel R. Campbell, 1/8th Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders, with the personnel of his battalion headquarters, and by 6.45 A.M. had all been killed or captured.

Lieut.-Colonel Campbell then climbed the railway embankment and discovered that another party of the enemy was being held up by two companies of the 1/6th Seaforth Highlanders, who were to have relieved his own battalion. He instructed the Seaforths to advance as soon as his men opened covering fire from the embankment, with the result that this party of the enemy was also annihilated. The line was then carried forward to the Chemical Works.

Meanwhile, the 1/5th Gordon Highlanders of the 153rd Brigade had been put at the disposal of Br.-General Burn and ordered to carry out a counter-attack with the object of recovering not only the Chemical Works but all the ground which had been lost. Learning that the barrage was to start on the line of the Rœux—Gavrelle road, Lieut.-Colonel Campbell withdrew his men north of the railway to a trench west of the road. South of the railway 2nd-Lieutenant J. Bliss of the 6/Seaforth decided not to withdraw, but to push further forward as the enemy appeared to be yielding. Actually, the barrage south of the railway was stopped after a few rounds had fallen. The counter-attack of the 1/5th Gordon Highlanders, pushed with great gallantry, recovered all the ground lost by the 51st Division except in that small sector where it was relieving troops of the 17th.

The 17th Division had been involved in the previous day's bombardment, and its right flank came within the area of the German counter-attack. Br.-General G. F.

Trotter, commanding the 51st Brigade, had taken over from Br.-General Yatman of the 50th, but the 6/Dorsetshire and 10/West Yorkshire were still in line and were in process of relief by the 51st Division. North of the Fampoux—Plouvain road the assault broke in on a narrow front. Further north parties of the enemy penetrated considerably deeper in the confusion and the semi-darkness; but they were themselves as much confused as the defence. At brigade and divisional headquarters the situation appeared worse than it really was. Actually, the counter-attack which they set in motion had for the most part only to reoccupy trenches in which parties of British troops were still established. The front line north of the railway (Cupid Trench) was, however, definitely held by the enemy, and an attempt at 7.30 P.M. to recover it failed. This operation was to have been carried out by the 1/5th Gordon Highlanders (153rd Brigade, 51st Division) and the 7/Border Regiment (51st Brigade, 17th Division). It was an error to rely on the latter battalion, which was north-west of Fampoux and was given insufficient time to make its way forward. Apparently Br.-General Trotter did not realize how little the 8/South Staffordshire, which had carried out the earlier counter-attack, had had to do and considered it incapable of completing the work. In consequence, the 1/5th Gordon Highlanders attacked alone, and although it entered the lost trench, was forced out again.

This was an unfortunate ending, but the operation had otherwise been strikingly successful. The ground recovered by the fresh German division thrown in with the object of retaking Rœux and the Chemical Works represented only a fraction of the British gains, and it was dearly bought.¹ Though less than one hundred further prisoners were taken, considerable numbers were mown down when they streamed back after the recapture of the Chemical Works, fired on by every available Lewis gun and rifle of the 10/West Yorkshire. The resolution displayed in both attack and defence well merited the praise of Sir Douglas Haig and General Allenby. Minor affair though it was, the success of the 4th Division's attack gave the Commander-in-Chief something to work upon in studying the question of the strictly limited offensive. The defence, too, was encouraging. All troops are apt to become pessimistic if even small bodies of the enemy break into their front, without considering that such breaches may often be turned into death-traps.

¹ See Note at end of Chapter.

Infiltration, while disturbing to the defence, is not an infallible recipe for victory against defenders who keep their heads.

11 May. On the front of the VI. Corps a minor operation was carried out by the 56th Division on the evening of the 11th, an hour later than the first phase of that of the XVII. Corps, *i.e.* at 8.30 P.M. Similar methods were employed to effect the necessary artillery preparation as unobtrusively as possible. The surprise was complete and the affair was a brilliant success, the 168th Brigade (Br.-General G. G. Loch) capturing the enemy's front line, here known as Tool Trench, on a front of little short of a mile from just south of the Cambrai road at Cavalry Farm northwards. The farm building had already been found empty, but there was hot fighting on the left, and all might not have gone so well had not an officer of the 168th Machine-Gun Company laid low with a spade the No. 1 of a German gun which was just coming into action. Twelve prisoners, two heavy machine guns and four light were captured. The latter were appearing in increasing numbers amid the booty of successful attacks, showing that equipment with this new weapon was proceeding quickly.

12 May. Very different was the fate of the next evening's operation further north, in which a three minutes' preliminary bombardment was employed. The objective was the enemy's first line, Devil's Trench, which was attacked by the 76th Brigade of the 3rd Division on a front of about six hundred yards east of the Monchy—Pelves road, and by the 36th and 37th Brigades of the 12th Division between the Monchy—Pelves and Monchy—Pelves Mill roads. None of the three battalions engaged could establish a footing in the enemy's line, and their total casualties amounted to about 180.

On the night of the 14th the 29th Division re-entered the line in relief of the 3rd and on the 17th took over the front of the 12th Division also. At this time reports that the enemy was about to retire to the Drocourt—Quéant Line recurred, and all divisions were instructed to patrol actively and to keep the German front under careful observation. Lieut.-General Haldane had previously issued orders for the capture of Hill 100, or Infantry Hill, and the Bois des Aubépines by the 29th Division, and for the 56th to protect its right flank by capturing a small portion of Tool Trench which was still in German hands. The attack was carried out at 9 P.M. on the 19th by five

platoons of the 1/8th Middlesex (167th Brigade, 56th 19 May. Division) and 18 platoons of the 1/R. Inniskilling Fusiliers, 1/Border Regiment, and 2/South Wales Borderers (87th Brigade, 29th Division). It resulted in failure, the enemy being thoroughly alert; and two parties of the Inniskillings, which behaved with great gallantry and held their objectives for some time, were for the most part cut off.

One more attempt was made by the 29th Division. This 30 May. time the object was not to clear the whole of Hill 100 but, as a preliminary to doing so, to capture the enemy's first line on a frontage of 1,500 yards astride the Monchy—Boiry road. The operation was carried out by the 86th Brigade with two of its own battalions and one, the 8/East Lancashire, detached from the 37th Division, which had relieved the 56th on the right. Major-General De Lisle's first intention was that there should be no artillery fire unless it were called for; the troops were simply to crawl forward in the darkness and rush the trench. Unfortunately, a man, possibly a deserter, walked into the enemy's lines. Fearing that the secrecy of the plan was compromised, Major-General De Lisle decided to postpone the attack from 12.40 A.M. on the 30th May until 11.30 P.M. that night. He also concluded that owing to the moonlight it was no longer feasible to dispense with artillery support. The Germans evidently saw the troops leave their trenches a quarter of an hour before Zero and brought down their barrage within five minutes. On the greater part of the front the attack broke down. In the centre a party of the 16/Middlesex got in, but was not reinforced, and, assailed next morning from all sides, was compelled to surrender.

The commanders both of the VI. Corps and the Third Army were dissatisfied. Lieut.-General Haldane considered that a second determined attack might have saved these gallant men, and suggested that night operations should be abandoned till the drafts of which most divisions were largely composed had undergone further training, as it was impossible to control them in darkness or even to ensure that all went forward. General Allenby's comment was that the troops should not have left their trenches in moonlight before Zero; that the operation might have been postponed if conditions were unfavourable; and that partial success should be exploited. Such mishaps are always possible when the infantry is tried as highly as it was in the later stages of this battle.

During the period between the Third Battle of the

20 May. Scarpe and the end of May, the only activities of the VII. Corps were those of its right division, the 33rd, whose commander, Major-General Pinney, was responsible for the plan of operations.¹ A slow, steady bombardment of the Hindenburg Line was kept up, with no increase of heavy artillery fire till Zero. The first withdrawals of artillery had already begun, but their loss was more than compensated for by borrowing from the VI. and XVII. Corps, so that the total artillery at the disposal of the VII. Corps amounted to 206 heavy guns and howitzers, 98 field howitzers, and 306 18-pdrs. The attack was launched at 5.15 A.M. on the 20th simultaneously by the 98th Brigade (Br.-General J. D. Heriot-Maitland), which was to bomb down the Hindenburg Line to the Croisilles—Fontaine road, and by the 100th Brigade (Br.-General A. W. F. Baird) with one battalion of the 19th Brigade on its right, to capture the Hindenburg Line for a mile south-east of that road by a frontal assault. When he drew up the scheme Major-General Pinney had hoped that the Fifth Army would be able to co-operate by capturing the intervening portion of the Hindenburg Line. The Fifth Army had, however, exhausted its available forces in the struggle at Bullecourt and could not assist.

The enemy was surprised. The frontal attack captured the first trench easily, but a lodgement made in the support trench could not be maintained. The bombing attack, preceded by the blowing of a mine under the German block, reached its objective, the Croisilles—Fontaine road, in the first trench, but in the support was held up on the Croisilles—Chérisy road. Both attacks were renewed at 7.30 P.M., when the 98th Brigade made good progress down the Hindenburg support trench. In the frontal attack the 19th Brigade (Br.-General C. R. Mayne) passed through the 100th, which was exhausted. The Hindenburg Line, well-constructed as it was, was by now battered almost out of recognition. Finding some dug-outs and a number of the enemy in shell-holes between the front and support trenches, the attackers thought they had captured the latter, and the mistake was not discovered till darkness had made further movement impossible. As a fact, the support line was still formidable, by reason of a tunnel which ran beneath it, though it was only by the exits and by mounds of excavated chalk that it could now be recognized.

The 18th Division then temporarily took over the 19th

¹ The 33rd Division relieved the 21st on 12th May.

Brigade's front to give the latter time to reorganize. On 27 May. the 27th the attack on the Hindenburg support line was renewed at 1.55 P.M., a period at which the enemy was usually quiet after the midday meal, but one which—because it was generally desirable to have a half-light either for the assault or for the subsequent consolidation—was seldom selected for attacks. The 19th Brigade's frontal attack failed, but the 4/King's of the 98th Brigade bombed down across the Sensée, reached the Croisilles—Fontaine road, and established touch with the 19th Brigade in a communication trench beyond it.

The outcome of the series of operations was, therefore, the capture of the front Hindenburg Line on a frontage of a mile and a quarter and of the support trench for over half that distance, with about 220 prisoners, but at a cost of upwards of 2,000 casualties. The attacks had been conducted with skill, one feature being the preparation of dummy machine-gun battery positions, which drew heavy fire, whereas in one case a battery in action a stone's throw away was left unmolested. There was, however, the same unfortunate feature that has been observed elsewhere: too much was asked of the troops. The division was fit for the first attack, and right well it carried it out; but for that of the 27th, the 19th Brigade was really not fit and was unable to do itself justice.

FIRST ARMY

On the southern edge of the Lens coal-mining basin, a 5 May. minor operation was carried out by small parties of the 10th Brigade, 4th Canadian Division, at 9.45 P.M. on the 5th May. The whole objective, a triangle of trenches three-quarters of a mile north-west of La Coulotte, was captured and held in face of fierce resistance, 40 prisoners being taken. On the 7th a counter-attack was repulsed. At mid-night on the 9th/10th the 10th Canadian Brigade extended its gains southward in the enemy's first and support lines for a distance of 300 yards. Next evening the Germans again counter-attacked, and were again driven back. They would not, however, accept the verdict, and renewed the assault, with the result that the Canadians were eventually expelled from the greater part of their gains of the 5th May. At 5 P.M. on the 11th, however, the 44th Battalion launched a surprise assault without a barrage and recovered all the lost ground.

By the morning of the 5th May the 5th Division had relieved the 2nd Division and the 1st Canadian Division, and the front from north-west of Oppy to north of Fresnoy was taken over by the XIII. from the Canadian Corps. It was not an easy position to hold, because Fresnoy was in a sharp salient and more than half the Oppy—Méricourt line between it and Oppy was still in the enemy's hands. A determined attempt to recover Fresnoy was to be expected. The German command might put up with the capture of "the Arleux Nose", but the breach of the next line at Fresnoy was another matter.

The 7th May was a lively day, during which considerable movement of hostile troops was observed. An artillery barrage was laid behind the British front line and various points were registered by heavy howitzers. In the morning the Nieuport machines of the Tenth Wing R.F.C. repeated their exploit of five days earlier against the German balloons.¹ On this occasion they destroyed seven, as against four in their former attack, but whereas they had previously returned without loss, they now had one machine shot down.

8 May.

During the night of the 7th the British trenches and batteries were heavily bombarded with high-explosive and gas shell. There were serious casualties among the infantry, and several guns were hit.² About 3.45 A.M. on the 8th, at a moment when there was no shelling except for the gas bombardment of the British artillery, parties of the enemy suddenly advanced and effected a footing in the Canadian position on the extreme right. Here the 4th Canadian Brigade was in the act of relieving the 6th. The incoming and outgoing battalions between them restored the situation, and the 28th Battalion did not finally withdraw till it was assured that its relief, the 19th, was firmly established. The 12/Gloucestershire and 1/East Surrey of the 95th Brigade beat off the attack. Two hours later there came another of a very different type, a heavy assault under a thick barrage.

That, briefly, is the sequence of events as described in the British reports. Actually, there was no intentional German attack at 3.45. The only attack contemplated by the enemy was that which he launched at 5.47 A.M., British

¹ See p. 445.

² According to the German accounts, at least 100,000 rounds were fired on to the Fresnoy salient from the night of the 6th to the morning of the 8th, not counting 27,500 rounds of gas shell fired on the British batteries during the night of the 7th.

time. As was ascertained from prisoners, this was carried out by a fresh German division, the *5th Bavarian*. The attackers did not know the ground, and it seems certain that the *Stosstruppen* in the van and perhaps the platoons immediately behind them collided with the British front while covering the assembly.¹ In the real attack the enemy broke through, completely crushing the 12/Gloucestershire and the right of the 19th Canadian Battalion. The support of the British field artillery was for several reasons very weak: several guns had been damaged by fire, the recoil springs of others had been broken, and some of the detachments were seriously affected by gas; most important of all, the rocket signals of the infantry were unseen in the dense mist. The line of the 1/East Surrey was rolled up by the enemy. The battalion abandoned Fresnoy, but was almost annihilated in attempting to retire. The whole front in the Fresnoy salient fell back to the eastern outskirts of Arleux, the 13th Brigade on the right of the 2nd Canadian Division refusing its left flank to the Arleux—Neuvireuil road.

A counter-attack by the 5th Division at 2.30 A.M. on the 9th failed, largely owing to the heavy shelling of Arleux, which dislocated the formations for the assault. In any case, it had no support from the Canadians, because in the darkness runners were unable to find three companies of the 20th Canadian Battalion, which was to have taken part in the operation. Thus, though the 15/R. Warwickshire, which displayed great gallantry, actually re-entered Fresnoy, the venture never had a fair chance of success. The line was finally established half-way between Arleux and Fresnoy.

The counter-attack was launched either too late or too soon. If it was impossible to carry it out on the morning of the 8th—when, as a matter of fact, the German rifles and machine guns were to a large extent useless owing to being clogged with mud—it would almost certainly have paid to wait a little longer and then carry out a deliberate, well-prepared counter-stroke. As it was, the troops were tired, suffering from the effects of continuous bombardment, and in some cases short of food.

The loss of Fresnoy was perhaps the most serious the British had suffered in any German counter-offensive of the battle, from the moral as well as from the material point of view. It was also one of the comparatively rare

¹ See Note at end of Chapter.

instances of a position captured by the British and held for more than three days being then lost to a counter-attack. Nor was the First Army commander in a position to repair the damage. He had no division sufficiently fresh for the task, and by the 14th May the first echelons of the batteries ear-marked for transfer to the Second Army began their moves. As a consequence, the only further activities of the Army before May was out were two of a quite minor character.

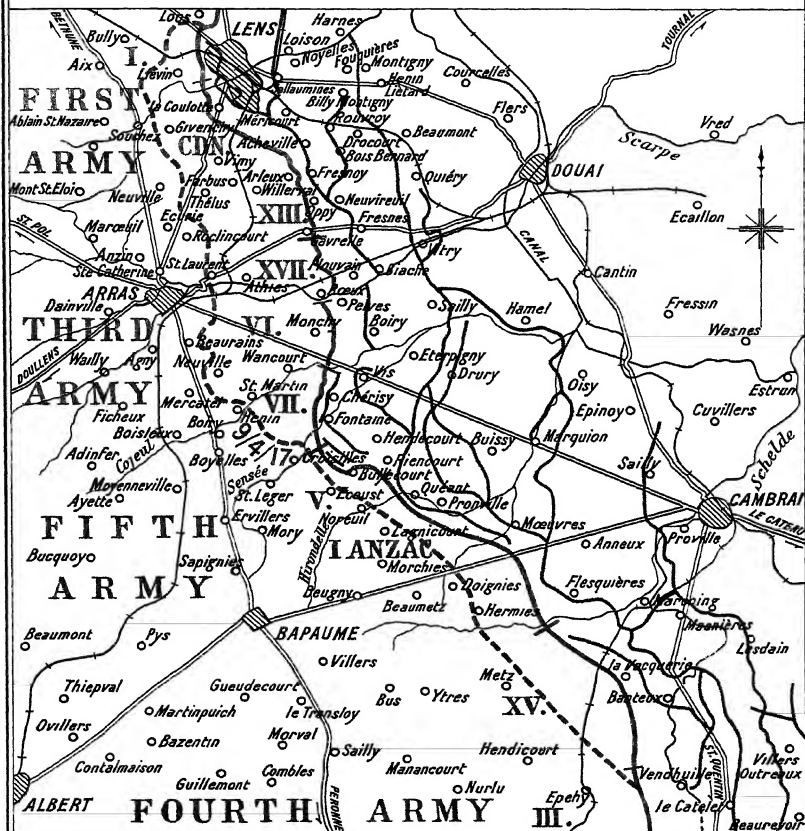
The first was on the right at Gavrelle. Here the 18/Durham L.I. (93rd Brigade, 31st Division), attacking astride the Douai road at 12.30 A.M. on the 18th, failed to capture the enemy's front-line trench. The other, nearly ten miles to the north, south-east of Loos at the hinge of the German retirement after the loss of Vimy Ridge, was also unsuccessful. The 1/6th North Staffordshire (187th Brigade, 46th Division) took its objective, a trench called Nash Alley, on the evening of the 24th, but was forced to withdraw the following morning.

The Battles of Arras may now be considered to have come to an end. According to the official nomenclature of battles, they include further operations in June and even the Battle of Hill 70, not beginning until mid-August, when the Flanders offensive was in course. These were, however, not only of a local character—as, indeed, were those recorded in this chapter—but subsidiary to the main offensive. They can therefore be conveniently dealt with at a later stage.

Nor is there need to dwell particularly upon the episodes which have just been described and which will come within the scope of the review in the final chapter. The circumstances in which these actions were fought, and more especially the condition of the troops engaged in them, provide the factor governing their character. Where they were successful, as in the outstanding case of the Chemical Works, they do the highest honour to the courage and grit of the divisions concerned; where they were not successful—and in some such instances there was undoubtedly lack of resolution—full allowance must be made for what these divisions had already endured. The British citizen soldier had many failings, but it is doubtful whether the infantry of any other belligerent at this stage of the War and in these circumstances would have risen to an occasion as did that of the 4th Division in the capture of the Chemical Works.

ARRAS, 1917

The End of the Battle.



British Front at
the End of the
Battle. } ———

German Lines,
constructed and } Green
under construction

SCALE OF MILES. 0 1 2 3 4 5 10 15

Compiled in the Historical Section (Military Branch)

During the months of April and May the three Armies engaged in the offensive captured approximately 20,859 prisoners and 254 guns.

NOTE

THE GERMANS AT FRESNOY, RœUX AND FONTAINE

From the point of view of German dispositions and action the chief interest of the period lies in the events of the 8th May at Fresnoy, the 11th and 16th May at Rœux, and the 20th May south of Fontaine les Croisilles.

The *5th Bavarian Division*, assembling about Douai between the 1st and 3rd May, received orders on the 5th to recapture Fresnoy. The operation was to be a deliberate counter-attack (*Gegenangriff*, as opposed to the *Gegenstoss* or immediate counter-attack frequently carried out in the course of the battle). All three regiments were put in, the *21st* with its right on the Lille road, along which ran the northern edge of Fresnoy Park; the *19th* thence to the southern edge of the wood south of Fresnoy; and the *7th* against the remainder of the British position in the salient. The attack was supported by 27 field and 17 heavy batteries, not taking into account the artillery of neighbouring divisions.

The *21st* reports only one temporary hold-up. After that the battlefield was empty except for dead and abandoned arms and equipment. The strongest resistance came from the edge of Fresnoy Park, on the regiment's left flank, but it was speedily stifled. The *19th* in the centre lost the barrage owing to heavy rain having turned the ground to the consistency of glue. It also met with stronger resistance from the British and might not have reached its objective had not the *21st* disengaged its right. The *7th* also had trouble, but bombed up the trench south of the wood, rolling up the British front—that is, the line of the 1/East Surrey.

This highly successful attack was carried out in depth, each regiment having two battalions in line and one in reserve, and each battalion two companies in line, one in support, and one in reserve. The company passing through Fresnoy village was provided with a *Flammenwerfer*. The leading waves were ordered to push straight through to the final objective; the supports to clear the captured ground and provide flank protection; and the reserves to fill gaps or co-operate in neighbouring sectors. The losses were comparatively heavy, 1,585 for the infantry alone, which probably means 1,750 in all.

The dispositions on the 11th May at Rœux, when the defence was overrun by the British 4th Division, have been given in the text. For the counter-attack carried out on the 16th a fresh division was again employed, this time the *38th*, which had come from the Quéant area and had been for a week in reserve to the *Sixth Army*. The operation was entitled "Erfurt", the use of such a code-name always implying that the German command meant business; again it was a *Gegenangriff* in the fullest sense. The *94th Regiment* attacked the station and the Chemical Works, the *95th* the village of Rœux.

Some companies came under hot fire on their way up and were delayed, but they just managed to assault in time, behind the barrage. The attack of the *95th* was, generally speaking, a failure. That of the *94th* was almost completely successful, but the battalions had suffered so heavily that they could not resist the British counter-attacks, especially as the British artillery and machine guns prevented their reinforcement. Finally, except for one company which held on north of the railway, the survivors withdrew to their starting-line. The casualties of the *94th* are given as 547 ; those of the *95th* are unknown. It was as complete a failure as the counter-attack on Fresnoy had been a success.

The attack of the British 33rd Division on the 20th May fell upon the *49th Reserve Division*, and mainly upon its centre regiment, the *225th Reserve*. The regiment had an awkward sector, forming a salient angle ; on the right the *Chérisy-Riegel* from the Fontaine—Héninel road to the Hindenburg Line, and on the left the Hindenburg Line to a distance of 1,000 yards south-east of the Sensée. On both sides of the angle the defence collapsed with heavy casualties, and the regiment was severely shaken. On the 21st May the division was relieved by the *220th*, which had previously held this front and which faced the later attack of the 33rd Division.

CHAPTER XXI

EVENTS OUTSIDE THE ARRAS BATTLEFIELD

(Map 1 ; Sketch B)

FOURTH ARMY

THE account of the Fourth Army's operations against the outposts of the Hindenburg position was carried up to the 9th April, the day on which the infantry of the Third and First Armies was launched to the attack at Arras.¹ Except in front of St. Quentin, which city formed a huge bastion jutting out two and a half miles from the main defences, the outposts of the Fourth Army were still on the average three miles distant from the entrenchment known to the British as the Hindenburg Line. The final stage of the process of closing up to it was likely to be difficult. It did not seem probable that the German infantry would defend the rest of the intervening villages to the last, but, on the other hand, it was to be expected that every village captured would be pounded by artillery comfortably ensconced behind the Hindenburg Line, and that the nearer the village was to that line, the more heavily would it be bombarded. The IV. Corps on the right was in touch with the French north of the Ham—St. Quentin road and had its left just north of the Omignon at Vadencourt ; the III. Corps in the centre held from thence to a line north of the linked villages of Epéhy and Pezière ; the XV. Corps on the left was in touch with the I. Anzac Corps, Fifth Army, on the Canal du Nord, south of Hermies. The seven divisions in the front line were faced by six and a half German divisions.

General Rawlinson's policy was still to advance cautiously, capturing outpost after outpost from the enemy, maintaining his own outposts well ahead of his line

¹ See Chapter VI.

of resistance, but moving that also forward as suitable positions were reached. His latest capture had been the village of Fresnoy le Petit, in the centre of the IV. Corps front, on the 7th April.¹ The Army's centre, the left of the III. Corps and the right of the XV., was particularly well situated. Holding the ridge from Lempire, through Epéhy, to west of Gouzeaucourt, it looked down a series of valleys towards the Hindenburg Line and generally commanded the German outposts, while at the same time its own communications were adequately covered from view.

The next blow was on the XV. Corps front, the capture of the big village of Gouzeaucourt by the 8th Division (Major-General W. C. G. Heneker). It had been arranged to attack after the fall of darkness on the 12th in order to avoid the enemy's fire, and to carry out the advance on compass bearings. The night proved to be wild and snowy, which helped to make the surprise complete. The 24th Brigade carried the village, which lay in a hollow, while the 23rd established itself on the spur separating this valley from that in which lay Villers Guislain. At 4 A.M. next morning the 144th Brigade of the 48th Division (III. Corps) advanced its line on the spur north of Hargicourt.

The most difficult problem was that of the right flank. General Humbert, commanding the French Third Army, which contained thirteen divisions, had orders to attack between the Somme and the Oise prior to the main French offensive on the Aisne. He had contrived to push forward a considerable amount of artillery and was far stronger in this respect than the British Fourth Army, which had at the moment no piece in action more powerful than a 6-inch howitzer. He was at present employing 250 guns in his artillery preparation. He was, however, faced with a difficult task, with 25 miles of improvised communications over devastated country behind him. It was not made easier by the fact that, for the time being at all events, the French were resolved not to bombard St. Quentin and were particularly anxious not to damage the cathedral, which furnished the enemy with a first-class observatory. General Humbert decided to attack first of all the bastion formed by the St. Quentin defences, from just east of the national road which ran through Vendeuil towards La Fère, to the suburb of Rocourt, north of the Somme. Only if he were successful here would he launch an attack next day on the Hindenburg Line down to Alaincourt on the Oise.

¹ See p. 160.

General Humbert requested General Rawlinson to attack the village of Fayet simultaneously with his own preliminary operation. The commander of the Fourth Army did not, however, feel himself in a position to do so, for much the same reason as the French had for attacking in two stages, namely, that his flank was likely to be subjected to heavy fire from St. Quentin. He did, however, issue instructions to Lieut.-General Woollcombe, commanding the IV. Corps, to hold his right division in readiness to seize Fayet immediately if the French attack were successful. He also, needless to say, gave all the artillery support in his power, both in the preliminary bombardment and during the infantry assault. As the only heavy artillery at the disposal of the IV. Corps consisted of the LXII. and LXXXIX. Heavy Artillery Groups (four 60-pdr. and four 6-inch howitzer batteries), the 4.5-inch howitzers of the 32nd Division were also employed in the bombardment. In direct support of the attack the 18-pdrs. of this division fired on the north-western defences of St. Quentin. The weather, as has been noted in connection with the operations at Arras, was bad, with very poor visibility.

The French attack was launched at 5 A.M. on the 13th, the 1/Dorsetshire of the 32nd Division (Major-General C. D. Shute) pushing forward along the spur across which ran the Savy—St. Quentin road in order to keep touch. On the French right the German first line astride the La Fère road was captured and two counter-attacks were defeated. On the left, however, the assault either failed, or where it momentarily broke in was driven out again by counter-attacks. The attempt was renewed in the afternoon, but again the left failed and the progress of the right was very small.¹

General Rawlinson, nevertheless, now revised his instructions to Lieut.-General Woollcombe and directed him to capture Fayet, Thorigny and Pontruët. As the occupation of Fayet would most materially assist the French, the 32nd Division was directed to seize it forthwith.²

This operation was carried out by the 97th Brigade (Br.-General C. A. Blacklock). The brigade, though widely scattered, was in position by 2 A.M. on the 14th April, and the attack was launched at 4.30. The first objective

¹ F.O.A. v. (i.), p. 609. With regard to the failure on the left, a British aeroplane photograph taken on the 12th showed that the wire-cutting here was inadequate. It was passed on to the French that afternoon.

² As will appear, no attempt was in fact made to occupy Thorigny or Pontruët.

was the village itself, the second, the St. Quentin—Gricourt road beyond it. The right flank was covered by the 14th Brigade (Br.-General F. W. Lumsden), which was to seize Cépý Farm, south-east of Fayet. This task was carried out by the 1/Dorsetshire, in face of heavy fire. The 2/K.O.Y.L.I. and 16/Highland L.I. of the 97th Brigade cleared Fayet, but were forced to entrench west of the final objective. A counter-attack then pressed the right battalion back to the Fayet—Fresnoy road. The situation was an ugly one, as the left was dominated by the copses north of Fayet. Major-General Shute therefore ordered Br.-General Blacklock to capture them as quickly as possible.¹

The 32nd Division had admirably adapted itself to the present type of semi-open warfare, as is proved both by its artillery arrangements and by the speed with which this attack was launched. Lieut.-Colonel A. S. Cotton, commanding the CLXI. Brigade R.F.A., remained throughout the engagement in touch with Br.-General Blacklock and held at his disposal all the three field artillery brigades which were supporting the infantry.² He was able to arrange for a bombardment of the copses to begin at 1 P.M. Meanwhile the 11/Border Regiment hastily withdrew from the original front line, concentrated in the valley half-way between Selency and Fresnoy, and advanced north-eastward over the open rising ground in the direction of the copses, which it carried by 2 P.M. The other two battalions were then enabled to close up on their objectives. They captured a large number of prisoners, some of whom had attempted to escape towards Gricourt but were driven back into their arms by the 17/Lancashire Fusiliers (104th Brigade, 35th Division). This latter battalion, on its own initiative, then pushed into Gricourt, taking over fifty more prisoners. The total haul of the IV. Corps was five officers and 433 other ranks, the 32nd Division suffering 402 casualties. The operation was a fine example of good organization, judicious delegation of authority, and quick movement, allied with determination.

That same morning, the 14th, the 59th Division (Major-General C. F. Romer) of Lieut.-General Pulteney's III. Corps seized two farms, Grand Priel and Ascencion, on the spur south of Villeret, as a preliminary to the capture

¹ These copses are not shown on Map 1; they were south of the last t in Fresnoy-le-Petit.

² The CLIX. Brigade (35th Division) was attached to the 32nd Division for the operation.

of that village. After a bombing fight lasting some hours Villeret was cleared by the 2/6th North Staffordshire in the early hours of the 16th. On the morning of the 15th, the 104th Brigade of the 35th Division (Major-General H. J. S. Landon) captured a trench between Pontruet and Gricourt and a big farm known as Les Trois Sauvages, east of the latter.¹ Pontruet was found empty next day. On the wet and stormy night of the 16th the 48th Division (Major-General R. Fanshawe), on the left of the III. Corps, captured Le Tombois and Petit Priel Farms, north-east of Lempire. Gillemont Farm, on the Ronssoy—Bony road, which was to win some notoriety in the British offensive of 1918, held out on this occasion. It was captured on the morning of the 24th, but regained by the enemy, and the 144th Brigade suffered over 400 casualties before the spur on which it stood was secured as the result of a further attack late that night. Three counter-attacks were repulsed by the 7/Worcestershire on the 25th. On the 27th the 178th (59th Division) attacked Cologne Farm and a quarry east of Hargicourt, after very detailed preparations and even rehearsals. The farm was just in rear of a strong, continuous line of defence, comprising two trenches, in the wire of both of which gaps had to be cut. The attack took the first trench and the quarry, but failed to reach the second.

Meanwhile Lieut.-General Du Cane's XV. Corps had carried out a series of operations lasting a week, the object of which was to capture, first Villers Guislain; secondly, Gonnellieu; thirdly, Villers Plouich and Beaucamp; and, finally, Trescault. The 23rd Brigade had little difficulty in taking Villers Guislain on the morning of the 15th.

The front of the XV. Corps was held by three divisions; on the right the 8th from north of Peizière to north of Gouzeaucourt; in the centre the 40th with left near the southern outskirts of Metz en Couture; on the left the 20th with left on the corps (and Fourth Army) boundary, the

¹ Both the 59th and 35th Divisions were on their mettle. Owing to faulty artillery co-operation, the 59th had failed a few days earlier in a small operation against Le Verguier (see p. 160). It had been taken over by a new divisional commander, and some other changes had been made. In the case of the 35th Division, the attack of the 15th April was the first operation of any importance carried out since its reorganization. It had been formed as a "Bantam" division, of men between 5 feet and 5 feet 3 inches in height. The experiment had failed because, though the original Bantams were well-developed men below the average height, the supply soon ran short, and the drafts were frequently immature and even degenerate. Its ranks had been refilled mainly from disbanded yeomanry and cavalry depôts.

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Canal du Nord. Gonnellieu thus came within the zone of advance of the 8th, Villers Plouich and Beaucamp within that of the 40th, and Trescault within that of the 20th.

At 4.20 A.M. on the 21st April the 25th Brigade (Br.-General C. Coffin) of the 8th Division attacked Gonnellieu, while the 119th and 120th Brigades of the 40th advanced their front within striking distance of Villers Plouich and Beaucamp. The two divisions were moving along the spurs, on either side of the Couillet valley, which were destined to become famous in the Battle of Cambrai at the end of the year, under the names of Welsh Ridge and Highland Ridge.

The 2/Lincolnshire of the 25th Brigade experienced some stiff fighting in the village, but the 2/Rifle Brigade on its left sent in a company from the northern side, with the result that a large number of the enemy were cut off and either killed or captured. In all, 88 prisoners and six machine guns were taken by the 8th Division, and 55 prisoners by the 40th, whose operation was likewise successful. Meanwhile the 20th Division, which had been pushing forward its line in the southern part of Havrincourt Wood, was able to send partols into Trescault.¹

Trescault, however, had little tactical significance, and it was probable that the enemy would still fight for Beaucamp. The 40th Division (Major-General H. Ruggles-Brise) was faced with a stiff task when at 4.15 A.M. on the 24th it launched its attack against the spur north of Gonnellieu (119th Brigade, Br.-General F. P. Crozier), and the villages of Villers Plouich and Beaucamp (120th Brigade, Br.-General the Hon. C. S. H. D. Willoughby). It was supported by the divisional artillery, reinforced by the XXXIII. Brigade of the 8th Division and the XCI. Brigade of the 20th. Villers Plouich was captured by the 13/E. Surrey with over one hundred prisoners, and though the battalion, after suffering heavy loss from an intense bombardment, withdrew to a covered position on the eastern side of the village, it did not lose its hold upon it. The 14/Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders entered Beaucamp, but as a result of a heavy bombardment and of machine-gun fire from Bilhem, this battalion withdrew. On the right, the 119th Brigade had secured its objective.

Bilhem was a collection of farm buildings with enclosed ground of some 25 acres on the spur east of Trescault. It

¹ The prisoners belonged to the 22nd Reserve Division, which also left about forty dead behind, and in a smaller proportion to the 236th.

was to have been captured by the 20th Division subsequently; but now, in order to assist the 40th, Major-General T. G. Matheson ordered the operation to be carried out at 11 P.M. that night. After an artillery preparation, the 12/K.R.R.C. attacked the farm, one company forcing its way in through a gateway, and speedily captured it, with 14 prisoners and a machine gun. Next morning the 11/King's Own of the 120th Brigade retook Beaucamp without difficulty. The Bilhem spur proved an excellent observation post, and was to be invaluable as such both before and during the Battle of Cambrai.

Approximately 356 prisoners were taken by the XV. Corps in these remarkable operations of the 24th and 25th April. Its own casualties numbered about 480. The bulk of the prisoners belonged to one of the new series of German formations, the *236th Division*.¹ These new divisions contained unexpectedly good material. The *236th* apparently consisted as to some 40 per cent. of the 1918 class, the remainder being returned wounded and reservists. Having left Germany less than a fortnight previously and having already suffered in front of Villers Plouich, the division had had a rough introduction to warfare. The *234th* and *238th Divisions*, of the same series and of similar composition, had also been identified on the Army front, the former having suffered heavy loss at Fayet.

By the end of April the Fourth Army had captured almost all the villages west of the Hindenburg Line. Vendhuille and Honnecourt would have been untenable; Thorigny, Pontru and Pontruet could have been occupied, but would probably have proved traps. There remained the hamlet of La Vacquerie, east of Villers Plouich.

At the beginning of May General Rawlinson was preparing to attack the Hindenburg Line between Banteux on the Canal de St. Quentin and the bend of the Canal du Nord at Havrincourt,² with the object of capturing the Flesquières Ridge. This operation was to have been carried out simultaneously with another by the Third Army against the Drocourt—Quéant Line, which, if successful, was to be exploited by the Fifth Army turning the Hindenburg Line from Quéant eastward. General Rawlinson considered that La Vacquerie would have to be taken as a preliminary step some ten days earlier. However, the developments of Anglo-French policy already described pushed the project into the background, as division after

¹ See p. 111.

² See p. 410.

division was withdrawn. La Vacquerie was actually held for over an hour on the night of the 5th May as the result of a big raid by the 8th and 40th Divisions ; but the heavy losses from artillery fire showed that its permanent occupation would be extremely costly and was unwarranted unless the attack on the Hindenburg Line were restored to the programme. The village was eventually included by the Germans in a strong entrenchment which came to be looked upon as part of the Hindenburg Line proper.

There were no further operations of note. General Rawlinson's task was now to maintain his front—reduced to 17 miles when the French had completed the relief of the IV. Corps to the Omignon on the 20th May—with the minimum number of troops. By the end of the month this line was held by the Cavalry Corps on the right (4th Cavalry, 5th Cavalry, 2nd Cavalry and 3rd Cavalry Divisions) and the XV. Corps on the left (35th, 40th, 59th and 42nd Divisions). The XIV. Corps with the Guards, 8th and 32nd Divisions had been transferred to Flanders. The IV. Corps with the 20th and 48th Divisions had moved up to take over the right of the Fifth Army front, the whole of which, as already stated, passed to the Third Army on the 31st May. Administrative arrangements were soon functioning normally, aided by the repair of the main Péronne—Cambrai railway. This line, after reaching Tincourt on the 30th April, was subsequently pushed on almost to Gouzeaucourt. As the countryside, apart from buildings and trees, was virtually untouched by warfare, it was possible to save large stocks of hay, at a moment when, owing to the pressure of the submarine campaign, this was particularly valuable. Opportunities for training were better than on any other part of the British front. Once the construction of camps had been completed, the troops were housed in considerable comfort, though they missed the estaminets and comparative liveliness of inhabited villages.

A calm fell upon the right wing of the British Armies which was scarcely to be disturbed until the Battle of Cambrai, and south of that battlefield not until the German offensive of March 1918.

SECOND ARMY

Little need be said at this point concerning the Second Army during the first five months of 1917. The earlier

part of this period was uneventful; the later was distinguished by active preparations for the offensive, which will be recounted in the next volume. The front, from east of Laventie to Boesinghe, was held by the II. Anzac, IX., X. and VIII. Corps, with about eleven divisions in line, and until late in May rarely more than two in reserve.

The characteristics of this front were the use by both sides of trench mortars to compensate for their lack of heavy artillery, mine warfare with fairly frequent blowing of defensive camoufflets to wreck the opponent's galleries, and great activity in raiding. On the British side some of these enterprises were on an exceptionally large scale. In particular, that carried out at 5 P.M. on the 20th February by the 1/6th London (140th Brigade, 47th Division) is said to have brought in the largest number of prisoners ever taken in a raid by a British battalion on the Western Front. It was on a frontage of over 500 yards just north of the Bluff and half-way between the Ypres—Commines canal and railway. A feint operation near Hill 60 further north, and especially the blowing of a small mine there, drew the fire of all available German artillery on to nearby empty British trenches and quite deceived the enemy as to the true danger-point. As a result, the raiders met practically no hostile fire in going over. They remained an hour in the German position, which they completely wrecked, blowing up two mine-shafts and eighteen dug-outs, and returned with 118 prisoners and five machine guns. Their own casualties were 76, including two missing.

Two other very big raids were carried out in the same month, on the 21st by the 2/Auckland Regiment of the New Zealand Division near Bois Grenier, and on the 24th by the 10/Queen's of the 41st Division near Hollandscheschuur Farm, north-west of Wytschaete. The New Zealanders brought back 44 prisoners and claimed to have killed upwards of 200 of the enemy. They had, however, a large number of missing from companies which lost their way in mist and smoke, and the German communiqué claimed the capture of 39 prisoners. The West Surrey took 55 prisoners and a machine gun and blew in a mine-shaft.

The largest German raid took place on the evening of the 9th April and was carried out at Hill 60 against the 23rd Division. Enormous damage was done to the breast-works by the preliminary bombardment of four hours, and the division suffered 278 casualties, including 58 missing. A number of these were buried by the effects of the big

trench-mortar bombs, but a considerable proportion must have been taken prisoners by the enemy. The raiders, however, left 40 dead and two prisoners behind them and were prevented from blowing in the entrance to the main mine gallery in this area, which was undoubtedly their chief object.¹

On the whole the German raids were not successful. Out of a total casualty list of nearly 20,000 in the Second Army during the first five months of 1917, only 594 officers and men were reported missing. Most of these were killed and a number of them were captured in the course of minor British offensive operations or patrols.

Mention has already been made of a certain anxiety aroused in the mind of Sir Douglas Haig at the beginning of the year by the presence of some hostile reserves in the north—actually assembled in case the Dutch Government were goaded into hostilities by the unrestricted submarine campaign.² The hard frost of January, which converted the inundations on the Belgian front into solid ice and rendered them no longer a barrier, contributed to this anxiety, which was fully shared by the Belgians themselves. In consequence, instructions were issued that the defences of the Second Army should be strengthened. Entrenchment being practically impossible once the frost had penetrated deep into the soil, all that could be done was to increase the wire obstacles. For some weeks this was done on a great scale, though even the driving of iron screw-pickets into the frozen ground was no easy task. This alarm presently blew over.

In May the preparations for the offensive were intensified. The First Army took over the line as far north as the Lys, the division which had held the former right sector passing under its command. The II. Corps came into line on a narrow front south of the Menin Road between the X. and VIII. By the end of the month the Second Army comprised 17 divisions. After long quietude and severe restriction in the supply of ammunition and engineer stores, the Second Army was now for a brief period to assume the leading rôle.

¹ According to the history of the *204th Division*, over 500 men took part in the raid. The division claims to have "destroyed extensively" the British mining arrangements. It was also discovered from a sample of earth that the British had a deep-level shaft from which mining was being carried on far below any of the deep galleries of the Germans.

² See p. 58.

CHAPTER XXII

CONSIDERATIONS

(Maps 3, 8 ; Sketch A)

As usual, performance had lagged behind promise. The situation which appeared so hopeful when Generals Joffre and Haig met at Chantilly in November 1916 had assumed a very different appearance before the first half of 1917 was out. It was not merely that the Allied plans for the Western Front, as amended by General Nivelle and translated into action in the Battles of Arras, the Aisne and Champagne, had met with disappointment. These battles, indeed, represented the least unfavourable aspect, and that of the Western Front was bright by comparison with those of the other theatres of war.

Russia, who, in the eyes of enemies as well as allies, had appeared to be more favourably circumstanced and better equipped than ever before,¹ who had weathered the worst storms and need only for the ensurance of final victory "to lean", as Mr. Winston Churchill puts it, "with heavy weight upon the far-stretched Teutonic line", Russia was in disintegration and chaos. Rumania was clinging only to Moldavia and was doomed if Russia collapsed. Italy had not done ill, but the extreme nervousness of her command was not a good omen, even if her fears of German intervention on her front had more foundation than her allies believed. The spring offensives in Macedonia had been a complete failure. Outside Europe, the British had twice been repulsed before Gaza, the gateway to Palestine. Mesopotamia, where Baghdad had been occupied and its possession assured by a series of successful

¹ On 31st December 1916 the German Intelligence considered that Russia was in a happier situation than in the previous winter because in the recent fighting only part of her Army had been engaged and her loss in material had been slight. (G.O.A. xi., p. 492.)

actions, was a bright spot, but too far distant to shed much warmth or light upon the fortunes of the Allies. The losses of Allied and neutral shipping from the attacks of submarines had between January and April been more than doubled as regards the number of vessels and nearly trebled as regards gross tonnage, and in the latter month an average of fourteen ships had been sunk each day. Those who contemplated the disastrous figures of April had not the comfort of knowing that they represented the peak.

There was one compensating factor, the entry of the United States of America into the War. This, indeed, represented an enormous addition of strength. In place of Russia, the giant maimed in the arena, another and stronger giant had stepped into it. The United States had tenacity of purpose, unlimited man-power of high quality, vast material resources, great organizing ability, well-developed industrial plant. On the other hand, with respect to land warfare, she represented a giant almost unarmed. She now set about arming, certainly with thoroughness, but with a ponderous deliberation which was to keep her new allies on tenterhooks. Her support made it certain that the Central Powers would be ultimately defeated unless they could force a speedy victory; but that would have been equally the case had there been no Russian revolution, even without American intervention.

The question of the unified command in 1917, the means by which it was brought about, and the abortive proposals which were put forward at Calais on the 26th February, is political rather than military. The lessons to be drawn from it are for statesmen even more than for soldiers.

The project was initiated in London. It was concealed both from the British Government's military adviser, General Sir William Robertson, and from their Commander-in-Chief, Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig. The French Commander-in-Chief and General Staff, on the other hand, were admitted to the secret, so that they could prepare a scheme which their British colleagues would be unable to study or criticize in advance.

The origin of the Calais Conference is to be found in a telegram dated the 19th February, addressed to General Nivelle by Commandant Bertier de Sauvigny, Assistant Military Attaché in London.¹ It ran as follows :

¹ This telegram is the first officially recorded evidence, but Commandant de Civrieux, "*L'Offensive de 1917*", p. 40, mentions an earlier

" M. Lloyd George has had the following information communicated to me : General D. Haig (*sic*) has telegraphed that, having come to a complete agreement with you on the transport question, he no longer considers a meeting between the two Governments indispensable. In consequence, the War Committee has decided to unmask its batteries by bringing about a reunion, in the course of which he will ask you whether the projects of Sir D. Haig have in fact your approval. On the English side, Monsieur Lloyd George, General Douglas Haig and General Robertson. It will be proposed that you should attend as well as M. Briand and General Lyautey. Place of meeting will be Boulogne or Folkestone.

" Friday 23rd February would be the most suitable date, as Mr. Lloyd George has to make an important speech in the House of Commons on Thursday.

" These proposals will be made to-morrow, the 20th, by Mr. Balfour to the Ambassador, unless between now and then I should receive notice of your wishes."¹

Mr. Arthur Balfour duly made the proposal through the Ambassador, M. Paul Cambon, next day. As a result of their interview M. Cambon wired to his Government that the British authorities were anxious not only to settle the transport question, but above all also, before the launch of the offensive, to review " the resources, the state of preparation of the Armies, the intentions of the Commanders-in-Chief, and particularly to establish unity of views between these last ".² M. Cambon went on to

telegram, of the 16th, not preserved in the archives of the G.Q.G. or the Ministry of War. As this writer had access to the papers of General Nivelle, there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the telegram. Commandant Bertier de Sauvigny declared that on the previous day he had taken part in a conversation with Mr. Lloyd George lasting two hours. He represented the British Prime Minister as stating that he had complete confidence in General Nivelle and his ability to bring the operations to a successful end ; that it was necessary for General Nivelle to dispose of all the forces on the Western Front ; that though the prestige of Field-Marshal Haig with the people and the Army was too high to permit of his being openly subordinated to the French command, yet, if the War Committee considered the measure necessary, Mr. Lloyd George would not hesitate to give secret orders in this sense to the British Commander-in-Chief ; and that a conference should take place as soon as possible.

¹ F.O.A. v. (i.), p. 222. The contents of the telegram are not set out in the French history, the passage quoted having been supplied by the French Historical Service, which volunteered the information so that the compiler of this volume might be " supported by an exact and complete text ".

² F.O.A. v. (i.), p. 222.

report that, so far as he could gather, the object of the conference was to compel Sir Douglas Haig to subordinate his plans to the directives of General Nivelle : the British Government were perturbed by the erratic behaviour of their Commander-in-Chief, who appeared to be somewhat intoxicated by his good fortune and had recently granted some most unhappy interviews : it was evident that his character was a source of anxiety.¹

The ground having been thus prepared, the War Cabinet met on Saturday, the 24th February, and authorized the Prime Minister to aim at " the adoption of such measures " as might appear best calculated, as the result of the discussion at the Conference, to ensure unity of command " both in the preparatory stages of, and during, the " operations ". General Robertson had been told that there was no need for him to attend this meeting, and he travelled over to France with Mr. Lloyd George in ignorance of the fact that the question of unity of command was to be raised. Sir Douglas Haig, in reply to his request for agenda, was informed that, besides the transport question, operations in Macedonia would be discussed.

The French delegates, for their part, took with them to Calais the famous project of appointing a British Chief of the Staff at the French G.Q.G. and leaving the British Commander-in-Chief only, in effect, the functions of a French Army Group commander, combined with those of Adjutant-General to his own force, without a voice in the preparation of plans. This scheme had, in fact, been drafted by the General Staff of the French Armies of the East and North-East on the 21st, the day after M. Cambon's telegram was despatched.² It was not, however, produced until Mr. Lloyd George had requested General Nivelle to " put on " paper " the rules which he considered should guide the relations between the two commanders.

The project was not accepted. Another formula was substituted for it. After this scheme had in its turn been

¹ " Journal d'Alexandre Ribot ", p. 42. The phrase " good fortune " is doubtless an allusion to the baton of a Field-Marshal recently bestowed on the Commander-in-Chief. The mention of interviews recalled an incident which had been raised in the House of Commons. Some French journalists, engaged in describing conditions in the British Army for their papers, had visited G.H.Q., where Sir Douglas Haig had replied to their questions, though without, apparently, realizing that he was being interviewed in a journalistic sense. Among other statements which afterwards appeared in the French newspapers was one to the effect that the final victorious decision would be gained on the Western Front.

² F.O.A. v. (i.), p. 224.

amplified at a further conference, it worked comparatively well, though even then the measure of control which it gave to a foreign commander, an admirable fighting soldier but unproved in supreme command, over the military forces of the British Empire on the Western Front may be considered risky. Personalities apart, it was far less satisfactory than the unification of command in the hands of Marshal Foch in 1918. His was a special *ad hoc* appointment. He was placed in command not only of Field-Marshal Haig but also of General Pétain, a position which made him in a measure responsible to the British Government as well as to the French and afforded to him and his Staff the opportunity of taking unbiased views. General Nivelle, on the other hand, was the French Commander-in-Chief. However, while General Nivelle remained at his post, he and Sir Douglas Haig collaborated without serious friction, and the relations between their General Staffs were good. Yet, even if the proposal so suddenly and dramatically sprung at Calais belongs to the realms of might-have-been, it should not be forgotten. Its origin and implications should be pondered by those interested in the problem of the relations in time of war between the Government, their commander in the field, and Allied Governments, and especially by those who may have a voice in determining the nature of these relations.

To attempt to form an estimate of what would have occurred had the plans of General Joffre been put into effect is to enter the province of conjecture. The great German withdrawal would, it may be assumed, have taken place in any event, and the conclusion which has been reached in these pages is that the only possible means of taking advantage of it and throwing the enemy into confusion would have been to anticipate the withdrawal by means of a resolute attack delivered at the last moment of the preparations. The secret was so well kept that the British Army, despite its activity, did not discover the withdrawal until after it had taken place. On the other hand, the G.A.N. had an offensive ready mounted, which would have been far stronger under General Joffre's scheme than it was under General Nivelle's, and it is fairly certain that General Joffre, with all his attention and all his hopes concentrated on the Somme front, would have launched this offensive at the first warning of what was impending. General Nivelle, on the other hand, ignored the warning of the G.A.N. Had General Joffre succeeded in launching an

attack just before the first "marching day" of the German retirement, he would have gained a far-reaching victory.

In the early part of 1917 the Allies had less than their share of good fortune. The January frost was by no means unprecedented, but it was by far the severest of four winters of warfare. In proportion to its rigour was the damaging effect of the thaw upon communications. At the same time the crisis on the railways came to a head, while just previously the port of Boulogne had been blocked for 27 days. These handicaps caused serious delays, which spoiled such chances as there were of the offensive being launched before the enemy fell back.¹ Finally, the heavy and prolonged April snowstorms which blinded the Allied artillery and caused serious loss in transport animals could also be paralleled, but only about once in a decade.

It has sometimes been stated that the postponement of the offensive was due to unreasonable British demands for delay. It is clear, however, from the French official history that, while disputing points of detail, General Nivelle fully recognized that the state of the railways on the British front and the very bad weather rendered it an impossibility to keep to the date previously fixed, the 15th March. Actually, as we know, the French, whose change of plan made it necessary for them to commence preparations afresh, had none too much time themselves and were barely ready when they did attack.

That the method of General Joffre—a series of attacks expanded as occasion offered, with strategic objectives fixed as the possibility of attaining them became apparent—would have had better prospect of success than that of General Nivelle is apparent now. The latter risked all, including, as it proved, the spirit of his troops, upon one blow. The best chance of success in such an offensive as he undertook lay, as was to be frequently exemplified in 1918, in a short hurricane preliminary bombardment, lasting not more than a few hours and allowing the enemy no time to alter his strategic dispositions—perhaps not even his

¹ Lieut.-Colonel Lord Stanhope, who was G.S.O.2 of the II. Corps when it was "pinched out" during the pursuit to the Hindenburg Line, describes an incident which throws light upon the effect of the weather on the British preparations. He was called to the telephone and ordered somewhat peremptorily to explain why the heavy artillery which was pulling out for transfer to the Arras front was behind schedule time. He replied that each 60-pdr. had to be drawn out with a double team of horses, in which case those horses could not do the scheduled marches on the following day, or dragged to a metalled road by a caterpillar tractor. His interlocutor answered: "I do not understand what you are talking about".

tactical dispositions—to meet the assault. Until reasonably accurate firing by the map had been made independent of preliminary registration this was an impossibility. “ Silent registration ” could seldom be completely reliable and was not an ideal in itself ; but it represented a way out of a difficulty. Such accuracy as it could attain had to be achieved by means of sound-ranging, flash-spotting and improved calibration allied with scientific calculation of the corrections to the range necessitated by variations of thermometer, barometer and wind, even taking into account such factors as the distortion of the paper on which the battery map was printed. The handling of the German artillery arm at Riga in September 1917 and of the British at Cambrai in November 1917 marked the progress made by both sides ; but the best example of artillery preparation on these lines was the “ Bruchmüller bombardment ” on the Chemin des Dames on the 27th May 1918. The British could not improve on the bombardment, but with the aid of the tank they finally improved on the method. So far as wire-cutting and the reduction of the foremost defences were concerned, though these were generally stronger than their own, the tank enabled them to dispense with artillery preparation altogether ; in the case of rearward defences and hostile batteries they then began the artillery preparation *simultaneously* with the infantry assault. When all the artillery opened with one crash, the bulk of the batteries were coming into action for the first time since they had taken up their positions, and the enemy had not been warned by discovering their presence. This contribution to surprise was perhaps the most valuable function of the tank in the Great War.

So far, the effective combination of all such methods was only dimly envisaged. Major-General A. E. A. Holland, General Allenby’s artillery commander, was ahead of his time and extremely bold when he advocated confining the artillery preparation to two days. As has been stated, his plan, though strenuously backed by his chief, was not favoured by most of the senior commanders and was opposed by the artillery adviser at G.H.Q., with the result that Major-General Holland was removed to another post. Yet while paying tribute to him as a pioneer, it must be noted that he neither had at his disposal the technical aids to accurate unobserved fire, while the great volume of fire necessitated by his scheme would have prevented detailed observation of results from the ground or the air, nor had

he the means for rapid wire-cutting on a very large scale in the shape of an instantaneous fuze for 18-pdrs. And it must be added that the deliberate preparation which was substituted for Major-General Holland's scheme was excellently carried out and extremely effective.

While the method of the long, deliberate artillery preparation was in force it was wiser not to count upon effecting a break-through; Marshal Foch never did so even in 1918. Experience, improvements in method, increase in artillery and ammunition since the 1st July 1916, had already made it reasonably certain that a well-thought-out offensive would be successful in its initial stage and would capture the enemy's foremost position with less loss to the attack than to the defence. Regarding the next step or series of steps it was wise to preserve an open mind. If it seemed profitable to repeat the blow in the same place, that could be done after a pause for fresh preparation. If a thrust to one flank or the other appeared to hold out better prospects, that would take little longer. If it were advisable to attack elsewhere, such an eventuality could be foreseen and in a measure provided for in advance. If, however, exploitation of the original attack was practicable, then the latter could be continued after the shortest possible pause.

Yet in the conditions of the long artillery preparation a measure of strategical surprise was occasionally possible, even without sham bombardments elsewhere, for which the artillery at the disposal of the British had never been sufficient.¹ It was achieved at Arras, even if this was partly due to the obstinacy of the opposing Army commander. On the Aisne it was not. The difficulties confronting General Nivelle became insuperable when the Germans received full and precise warning of his plans. The German dispositions as shown on Map 11 are the best commentary upon the prospects of the offensive. From just east of the Suippes to the Aisne—Oise Canal at Vauxaillon the Germans actually disposed at Zero of 38 against 53 French infantry divisions, and had more available within a few days. With the enemy's well-planned dispositions in depth, his careful training in the *Abwehrschlacht*, his thorough fortification of ground naturally well adapted for defence, the French task was an impossible one. British observers have sometimes

¹ In March 1918 the Germans carried out such false bombardments at Verdun and in Lorraine with every available heavy gun. "1918" Vol. I., p. 155.

been inclined to believe that the French infantry on this occasion fell short of its traditions and was lacking in resolution. The information from both sides here collected proved that there is no truth in the supposition. The French infantry in the circumstances did remarkably well, certainly on the first day when inspired by confidence in victory.

The British operations may be divided under four headings : the winter fighting on the Somme battlefield ; the pursuit of the enemy in his retreat to the Hindenburg Line ; the capture of the outposts in front of that line, which preceded the Battles of Arras and was continued by the Fourth Army throughout the course of those battles ; and the Battles of Arras themselves.

The winter fighting affords evidence that the British Armies had learnt much since the early stages of the Somme. The short-range enterprises were almost all successful and frequently at small cost. Casualties 65, prisoners 142 ; casualties 275, prisoners 200 ; casualties 382, prisoners 210—these figures for three small winter operations are in themselves remarkable, because, in view of the vast volume of fire supporting the attacks, the number of prisoners captured must be multiplied by two or three in order to arrive at the enemy's losses. The troops of all arms showed an intelligence and adaptability in these operations which was the fruit of hard-won experience and training.

Yet the lessons learnt applied only to one form of warfare. When the Germans fell back the British divisions were for the most part bewildered and helpless until they had accustomed themselves to a new form. The following extract from a letter written by a staff officer depicts a scene which was not unique :

" The G.S.O.2 of the division while visiting the front line . . . reconnoitred for himself in front of the brigade lines and found no enemy within 1,500 yards. He walked back over the open, taking cover from our own shells, which were dropping between him and our front line. On getting back to our own line he told the brigadier that the enemy had gone ; so patrols were sent out and an advance of about a mile was made without firing a shot. Continuous trench warfare had brought us to this state of affairs : a few sentries manning the front line and everyone else asleep immediately after dawn, no life in the Army, and touch lost with the enemy. The following morning he found our advanced patrols . . . collect-

"ing helmets, etc., as souvenirs. . . . Our inexperienced young soldiers seemed quite at sea when they got into the open, and enterprising young leaders were non-existent through lack of training in open warfare."¹

It has already been stated that, unless the British had been able to obtain in advance knowledge of the plan and above all of its time-table, there was no prospect of dislocating the German retirement on their front. The barrier of the shell-cratered area was the military equivalent of a marsh. Where conditions are such that field artillery cannot be moved until tramways have been laid to carry it, a rapid pursuit in force is out of the question.² It does, however, appear that more local advantages might have been gained had there been more alertness and initiative.

That lesson, too, was learnt. Several of the operations for the reduction of the German rear-guard positions and subsequently of the outposts to the Hindenburg Line were conducted with a skill which would have done credit to the most highly-trained troops. The capture of Heudicourt, Sorel and Fins by the 8th Division; of Holnon Wood by the 32nd; of Metz by the 20th; of the line Doignies—Louveral—Noreuil—Longatte—Croisilles—Hénin by the 5th Australian, 7th, 21st and 30th; of Hermies by the 1st Australian; and finally of Fayet by the 32nd were all characterized by quick and intelligent thinking as well as by resolution.³ Practically all the work fell upon the infantry divisions because the corps cavalry regiments were not strong enough for much more than reconnaissance. It was perhaps unfortunate that the cavalry divisions were so carefully husbanded for the coming offensive during this phase; for the work done by the 5th Cavalry Division during the few days it was at the disposal of the Fourth Army was brilliant.

In the Battles of Arras the same process can be observed at work. Before their opening the troops had time to learn their part thoroughly, and it is scarcely possible to frame a criticism of their performance on the first day. When the

¹ The commander of the 2nd Division, Major-General C. E. Pereira, had a very similar personal experience, but in even more distressing circumstances, because the episode occurred in the midst of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, on 18th April, when the big German withdrawal took place.

² See p. 102.

³ The student interested in this phase will find the detailed accounts of the Australian operations by Dr. Bean highly instructive and profitable. A monograph on the operations of the 32nd Division from the moment of the German withdrawal up to the capture of Fayet would be valuable.

conditions provided for ceased to exist, to be replaced by conditions calling for speedy decisions and unrehearsed action, troops and junior leaders were found wanting. As the battle progressed, however, they once more adapted themselves to circumstances. Indeed, in some cases the infantry, after suffering heavy casualties and great fatigue, did better than when it was fresh. The pity of it was that such magnificent material had, as in the Battle of the Somme, to be used in battle without the full training for war essential not only for success but also to avoid unnecessary casualties.

Liaison between field artillery and infantry in the Battles of Arras was generally fairly satisfactory. Forward observing officers rendered valuable service, which on occasion included the encouragement or rallying of shaken infantry. The system under which the field artillery was generally confined to a fixed programme did not, however, conduce to the establishment of a close understanding between artillery and infantry officers, because the latter could seldom ensure that the targets they indicated were engaged at the times they desired. Waste of effort—and of ammunition—was inevitable in such battles, but here it appeared to many artillery officers to be altogether excessive; in particular, the amount of shell expended on what were practically “area shoots” and the high proportion of shrapnel fired at trenches which might or might not be held in strength could seldom have been effective.

To judge by the complaints, liaison between heavy artillery and infantry must have been less well maintained than in the case of the field artillery. The cause was, perhaps, apart from the greater distance between batteries and the front line, the greater proportion of heavy and siege batteries which had only recently arrived in the theatre of war. Some of the junior officers did not realize that, if they were sent for liaison duty to a particular infantry formation, this did not imply that they were tied to it. Their task was rather to attach themselves to any unit on whose front their battery or group could fire, which was seriously in need of support, in order to break down resistance, to exploit success, or to repel a counter-attack. It is not only the infantry, but also the field artillery, the sister arm, which reports that good targets were frequently neglected and that the counter-battery work was uneven. This testimony, moreover, is supported by that of the Germans, who, after the terrible mauling of their artillery

in the first phase, were somewhat surprised that the batteries in action on the 23rd April should be virtually undamaged—*so gut wie intakt*—and that their observation posts should be able to function all that day without interference.

Ammunition supply rarely failed, though it might not have been so satisfactory had the advance after the first day of the battle been swifter, and the dumps were so carefully sited that loss through hostile fire was trifling.

This leads to a consideration of the work of the engineers, upon whom the supply of ammunition and of all the other needs of the fighting troops largely depended. The Royal Engineers constituted probably the most efficient arm of what was now in effect a hastily trained citizen army, because they brought from civil life technical knowledge of their tasks which left them less dependent than their fellow-soldiers upon training and experience in warfare. As their casualties were relatively light, they had also fairly good opportunity to profit by this training and experience. Their work on roads, light railways, bridges, and water supply was done effectively and promptly. They were, however, handicapped by the indifferent state of the British communications on the very eve of the offensive, and by the fact that, as of old, ammunition had precedence over engineer stores, even road metal. Probably few commanders or staff officers realized even yet to how large an extent the success of every operation on the Western Front depended on engineering, how much the campaign was, in the popular phrase, "an engineer's war". The late Sir Eric Geddes wrote to the compiler of this narrative that, when going round the batteries in action, artillery officers begged him to stop bringing up ammunition because they had all they wanted and their men were too tired to off-load more. This was indeed a happy state of affairs, but it is certain that no engineer officer said as much respecting engineer stores. The responsibility went back through the chain of the administrative staffs to the Quartermaster-General's Branch at G.H.Q., which had the daily allotment of the trains. It was only human nature that the artillery should have an exaggerated conception of its own needs, and its demands required careful scrutiny in the interests of the combined good of all arms. There are, indeed, instances of such scrutiny being carried out, but in general the demands were accepted without question. It may be added that the artillery was an easier "customer" than the

engineers. The latter required different natures of stores from day to day : sometimes mostly road metal, at others bridging material, then barbed wire, sandbags, and timber of different kinds, so that the Engineer-in-Chief could never accommodate the Quartermaster-General's staff by agreeing to accept a fixed daily allotment when the trains were made up.

Had the roads behind the Third Army's front been in a better condition at the start and had the supply of stone and timber been more plentiful, it is probable that the long pause of nine days between the attacks of the 14th and 23rd April could have been considerably diminished. And every hour of this period was valuable to the enemy in his feverish preparation of new positions of defence.

In the First Army zone the state of the roads at Zero appears to have been rather better than in that of the Third. Traffic upon them had been less heavy, but the collapse after the great thaw and the shortage of stone had been just as serious. Even the pavé roads, which were always considered the most reliable, were badly affected. The First Army had, however, in proportion to its far narrower offensive front, a larger stock of sleepers and beech slabs available than the Third. The temporary closing of the worst-damaged roads, which was the method of the Transportation Directorate and had been applied before its formation on inactive parts of the front, was here out of the question unless the offensive were to be postponed. In these circumstances General Horne placed his Chief Engineer, Major-General G. M. Heath, in control of the back-area roads for which the Deputy Assistant Director of Roads of the Army, working under the Director of Roads at G.H.Q., had been responsible, and even of the main arteries which were kept up by the French civil authorities. Two road commandants were appointed to control certain bad stretches, with the sole duty of keeping the traffic moving. Two field companies and three tunneling companies—whose work in the infantry subways was fortunately well in hand—were added to the labour available. Slab roads were then hastily laid, sometimes over bad stretches but more often as deviations round them to carry the traffic until road metal was available and could be consolidated. By these measures all roads were kept open, though the damage to lorries was serious. In the XVII. Corps, Third Army, when the effects of the thaw

were at their worst all ammunition trains were stopped for a period of several days on the representation of Lieut.-General Fergusson; only stone and engineer stores were sent up.

More might have been achieved had the officers commanding the divisional engineers been more regularly consulted, not after but before plans were framed. This applies not merely to routine work, but also to tactical problems. The extent of the rôle of the C.R.E. as adviser depended in part upon the views of his divisional commander and in part upon his own personality; but his experience and technical knowledge were frequently not used to the full.

In other respects also, it would assuredly be unjust and misleading to ascribe all the misadventures of the battle to lack of training and resource in the junior officers and the rank and file. German comment, indeed, is throughout very much more unfavourable to the British higher tactical leadership than to the conduct of the British platoon commander and his men.

It was, for example, through no failing on the part of the troops that the efforts of the right wing of the VII. Corps were largely wasted in the attack on the Hindenburg Line. Admittedly, one brigade by a combination of skill and gallantry did gain a footing in it; this does not alter the fact that a frontal assault on such an immensely strong position after a preparation made difficult and uncertain by the recent German retirement had the odds against it. The corps commander, Lieut.-General Snow, disliked this operation, and his view was justified by its outcome. One division would have sufficed to cover the flank here, and the Hindenburg Line could have been rolled up, as it eventually had to be.

On the other hand, north of the Scarpe the XVII. Corps had insufficient resources to exploit its remarkable success on the 9th April. Had another division been employed in accordance with the scheme put forward by Lieut.-General Fergusson, it is possible that this success could have been considerably expanded, with a favourable effect on the subsequent course of the battle.¹ Even with the resources at its disposal, the XVII. Corps might have accomplished more on the first day, when its 4th Division achieved nothing which could not have been more quickly achieved by the 9th. The passing of the 4th Division through the 9th was a good piece of staff work; but the rigidity of the pro-

¹ See p. 226.

gramme and especially the early deployment of the 4th Division prevented advantage being taken of the brilliant success which had been gained. Had the deployment been delayed so as to keep the 4th Division in hand while the 9th took the final objective, the 4th would have had a wonderful opportunity for exploitation. But for this purpose it would have been desirable to place a cavalry brigade, well forward, at its disposal.

As it was, while cavalry was massed south of the Scarpe, none was allotted to the XVII. Corps until any possible opportunity for its effective use had passed. It would appear that the Army commander regarded the progress of the XVII. Corps as of altogether inferior importance to the operations south of the river. In his scheme of exploitation the corps did play a secondary rôle, but it might have been able to give valuable aid to the VI. Corps. Even as late as the 28th April the XVII. Corps had better opportunities for exploitation than any other in the Army, as was proved by the events of that day. "On *s'engage partout, et puis on voit*", said the greatest of all strategists.

There is a French phrase, "*tyrannie du terrain*", to describe the powerful influence of certain configurations of ground upon military plans and dispositions. In this sense the lie of the land south of the Scarpe tyrannized the British attack. On the other hand, between the Douai railway and the road running through Arleux towards Lille, the attack had almost everything in its favour. In the former case the infantry constantly disappeared over sky-lines, to be lost to the view of the supporting artillery and exposed on the further slope to the German machine guns. In the latter, the artillery observers could not only follow every movement of the infantry but could also clearly see the approach of the German reserves and their advance to counter-attack. The Germans, on the contrary, though they had useful observation posts, especially at Bois Bernard and Mauville Farm, were unable to see wide sections of their Fresnes line of defence.

On this part of the front the Germans greatly feared a series of limited advances to gain possession of further commanding ground, which would extend the British view of the Drocourt—Quéant Line itself. They were also nervous lest the British, who to their knowledge had captured their text-book on the new system of defence, should, by means of such limited advances, draw in and exhaust the German

counter-attack divisions, and perhaps even prepare attacks to be launched immediately on the failure of German counter-attacks, when reserves and front-line troops were inextricably intermingled.

This front, which caused the enemy so much anxiety, was practically left out of British calculations. And when by seizing Fresnoy the British at one blow captured an invaluable observation post and breached a vital defensive line, they made singularly poor use of their success. The linear method of defence which they adopted permitted the rolling-up of their front by a hostile counter-attack, and their own failure to counter-attack while the chances were in their favour enabled the Germans to consolidate the position which they had recovered.

The Battles of Arras began brilliantly, and must be reckoned to be of considerable importance if only because 254 guns—an enormous haul for this period of the War—were captured from the enemy, yet in proportion to its promise this series of engagements appears on reflection profoundly disappointing. In all such operations, since the opposing fronts had become solidified, it was vitally necessary that the initial blow should be prepared with meticulous care and delivered exactly according to plan. Immediately after the successful delivery of such a blow, however, there came a short stage—not lasting beyond the second evening or at longest the third morning—during which there were opportunities for flexibility and improvisation in the employment of reserves. If, through errors or mischances, those opportunities were missed, persistence in such methods was of no avail. The best policy then was to stop, to consolidate the ground won, and to prepare for another general offensive almost as thoroughly as in the case of the first attack. With regard to Arras, this was recognized by Sir Douglas Haig, and the result of his intervention was the Second Battle of the Scarpe on the 23rd April, when a fair measure of success was gained. The decision, however, came too late for an Army which was not to be further reinforced. All subsequent operations were carried out by more or less tired troops against fresh hostile units.

There was not, in short, a full appreciation of the differing characteristics of these phases. Consequently, there was not sufficient differentiation in the methods employed during their course. These criticisms are not new, and the usual reply to them has been that continual attacks were necessary in order to assist the French. Successful

attacks, however, would have been more helpful to them than semi-failures, while, until the battle had obviously been broken off, the Germans would not have dared to move a man or a gun.

The working of the chain of command, which is in fact more than a chain and may be likened rather to a series of connecting rods communicating the impulsion of the driving-wheel to wheels in front, was also unsatisfactory, even taking into account the friction of battle. Some possible reasons for this emerge from a study of events. The fact that the inner boundaries of the three corps in the Third Army were rivers in itself made for lack of co-ordination of effort. Similarly, there seems to be no good reason why the narrow divisional frontages suitable for the original assault should have been maintained when the fighting had assumed quite a different character. As the need for manœuvre replaces that of straightforward thrust, it appears that the zones of action of the divisional, the brigade, and the battalion commander should be made wider and less deep, and that responsibility and freedom of action should be delegated to subordinate commanders who are well forward. The German system which made the battalion commander the real controller of the battle proved its value again and again. The tendency in the British Army was to tie down the battalion commander to a command post, which he was not allowed to quit. The reasons for this policy were, first, the desire to avoid the excessive casualties among lieutenant-colonels which had been incurred in some of the early engagements of the War ; and, secondly, anxiety lest the battalion should lose touch with the brigade. These considerations were, no doubt, important ; but in the course of a battle it is more necessary that a battalion commander should be in control of his troops than that he should be in touch with his brigadier, and a certain proportion of casualties among battalion commanders may well be the price of victory.

The fewer the staffs which have to issue detailed orders, the better is the prospect of those orders reaching the fighting troops in time. The wider, within reasonable limits, the field of action of the brigade and battalion commander, the more likely are the dispositions for attack to be suitable to the nature of the ground and of the enemy's defences. Possibly, even on the first day, had authority to co-ordinate the action of the 12th, 15th and 37th Divisions south of the Scarpe been delegated to one of their commanders,

Monchy le Preux would have been in British hands by nightfall. No ground could have better suited such an arrangement. The divisional commander in question would have had only to mount Observation Ridge in order to see the battlefield spread out in a panorama before his eyes and to direct his operations almost as Wellington directed his.

Complaints that staff officers did not regularly visit junior commanders and see the situation for themselves are so numerous that they cannot all be unfounded. If the staff officer does not act as his commander's eyes, no one else can take his place, because the reports which reach the battle headquarters are generally coloured by the problems of some particular fighting arm. That all staffs worked to the limit of endurance, and that they treated visits to the line as not merely a duty but even a relaxation, may be accepted without question; but some appear to have allowed office work to overwhelm them.

Again and again battalions report that orders to attack reached them so late that there was only just time to hustle their companies forward behind the barrage, furnished with the barest verbal instructions. In a few cases the orders actually arrived after the Zero hour. Staffs accustomed to the good work of the Signals service had in some cases forgotten that it is not sufficient to issue an order on a telegraph form and assume that it will be delivered within a normal period of time; that, on the contrary, it lies with the sender to ascertain what are the prospects of its delivery within that period. There were cases where, if a staff officer had carried the orders, driving or riding till it was necessary to take to his feet, they would have been delivered more quickly than over lines often cut by tanks, transport and shell-fire, and probably overcharged with messages when they were "through".

In the conditions prevailing, after the first attempts to exploit the victory had failed, major operations with limited objectives planned in almost the same detail as that of the 9th April would probably have been more profitable and less costly than many of the hastily mounted attacks actually carried out. They would have necessitated longer pauses, but that would have had the advantage of giving the limited number of divisions available more time for rest.

The British had good fortune on the first day in two respects. In the first place, the German tactical system of

defence was a new one, grafted on to fortifications not designed for it. In the second place, the hostile counter-attack divisions were so far from the battlefield that they were unable to fulfil their rôle and to launch deep, deliberate counter-attacks after the reserves of the front-line divisions had failed to restore the situation. Such counter-attacks would almost undoubtedly have had a measure of success. It must not be concluded that they would have been wholly and universally successful, and it is even possible that it would have been to the advantage of the British to encounter reaction on the first day, when they were flushed by victory, rather than later on. It must be recalled that the German artillery already in position had been mostly either captured or destroyed by the preliminary bombardment and the counter-battery fire carried out during the assault. To support the counter-attacks fresh artillery would have been required, and it would have had to advance across ground largely exposed to British fire and then take up positions in the open without epaulments or pits to protect the guns.

Nevertheless the German strategical dispositions, as they developed in the course of the Battles of Arras and were adopted prior to the opening of the French offensive on the Aisne, were the product of an extremely able appreciation of the then situation. For the enemy to provide such large reserves as he did in both cases required boldness as well as vision. It is of interest to contrast the state of affairs in the spring of 1917 and a year later. In the former case the defenders, with a marked inferiority of numbers, were able to provide adequate reserves to meet both offensives. In the latter, the defenders—now the Franco-British Armies—with a smaller numerical inferiority, could not find sufficient reserves to defeat the offensive of the month of March. It is only fair to add that the Germans had a homogeneous army under a single command, and, playing the weaker hand, the greater inducement to gamble.

It is no exaggeration to describe the moral effect of the new methods in the *Abwehrschlacht* or defensive battle as one of the most important factors in the military history of the year 1917. Suddenly the German regimental histories breathe a new spirit of confidence. The infantry, observing the rhythmic flow of the reserves in each engagement, gained an impression of leadership as something vital, active, and ever watchful of their fortunes. No unit

henceforth felt that it was to be left to its own resources ; each one knew that the machinery for supporting it existed and would be put in motion if that were humanly possible. It realized, too, that the better it fulfilled its allotted rôle the more efficiently would that machinery function. Probably this new strategy prevented the German forces from crumbling under the Allied attacks of 1917, as many of their leaders had feared they would.

Nor was the machinery strategic only. The manner in which the counter-attack was handled was also remarkable, and the junior leadership was strikingly good. The initiative of the German "under-officer" was frequently exemplified at Arras, though not so often as in the less rigid fighting at Ypres later in the year, by daring and resourceful local assaults which recaptured positions of importance. When British troops lost their officers, they were, on the other hand, apt to fall back, not because they were beaten but because they did not know what to do and expected to receive fresh orders. Perhaps the large numbers of officers commissioned and the fact that a sergeant rarely held command of a platoon for more than a few days lessened the prestige of the non-commissioned officer ; but the chief cause of his frequent inability to act for himself was lack of training. That, in turn, was due to the enormous drain of casualties ; to never-ending calls for working-parties, which narrowly limited the time available for instruction ; to the impossibility, owing to the extent of the front held by the British and the activity of the enemy on it, of taking divisions out of the line for sufficient training ; and to the shortage of good instructors in the home establishments.

When he really was a trained soldier, the British non-commissioned officer was unsurpassed in skill and initiative. His value was then very great, because even at his weakest he hardly knew the meaning of the word "defeat". The British rank and file drew upon an almost inexhaustible fund of courage and endurance. Few factors contributed more to the final victory than their doggedness, and, above all, their resilience.

Both in attack and in defence they were hampered by the rigid dispositions in which they were compelled to fight. These dispositions were designed to compensate for lack of training, as Napoleon's heavy infantry columns of attack had been ; but they had a numbing effect upon the development of the tactical sense. In no task is the initiative of the executant likely to develop without some freedom of

action. Intelligence increases largely in proportion to the calls made upon it.

Let us here quote another British observer, this time a divisional commander, Major-General C. E. Pereira of the 2nd Division. Of the German use of ground and method of infiltration he wrote after the Battle of Arleux :

“By its means they get up against our advanced line quickly, get snipers and machine guns in position, and organize bombing and larger counter-attacks. They dribble forward small and scattered parties preceded by snipers, who keep our men’s heads down and take advantage of all available cover; machine guns are gradually brought up to favourable positions, and under cover of vigorous sniping and machine-gun fire, larger numbers of troops are moved forward. . . .

“As regards our forces, officers are very young, and many men come out quite untrained—sometimes only nine weeks after enlistment. . . . It will be realized that the art of movement so as to gain every inch of advantageous ground can only be learnt by careful training; German troops are adepts at this, and their training gives them a vital advantage. Our troops are excellently trained to advance under a barrage, and in this respect are very much superior to the Germans; they suffer in comparison when called upon to carry out a manœuvre in semi-open warfare.”

Let it be added that the ground on which such tactics were employed against the 2nd Division was extremely disadvantageous from the German point of view, and that here the counter-attacks were consistently broken up by the British artillery with heavy loss. Elsewhere their frequent success was responsible for a very large proportion of the British casualties and caused the later fighting to assume the fluctuating and unsatisfactory character which has here been described. Yet there was no magic principle involved. If the use of automatic weapons, often handicapped by casualties and difficulties of ammunition supply, had been supplemented by steady and accurate rifle fire, these counter-attacks would almost always have failed.

The lesson is the old one : it is very difficult, against a foe who has got a start in tactical training, to improvise an army equally skilled, not in one form of warfare only but in several forms, even if the material be some of the best in the world.

CASUALTIES OF THE ARRAS OFFENSIVE

THE following casualty tables are from gross, uncorrected returns; the heading "missing", for example, undoubtedly includes a considerable number of killed, some wounded, and some absentees and stragglers who subsequently rejoined.

The most accurate figures available are those in the return made by the Adjutant-General, Lieut.-General Sir G. H. Fowke, for the months of April and May 1917, which is given below. It amounts to 87,226 for the Third Army, 46,826 for the First, and 24,608 for the Fifth, a total of 158,660 casualties for the three Armies which took part in the Arras offensive. This figure, however, includes several thousand casualties incurred in the fighting for the outpost villages during the first days of April, prior to the opening of the main offensive, and a considerable number more incurred by the outer flanks of the First and Fifth Armies outside the battle zone. The casualties actually suffered in the Arras offensive are probably rather under 150,000.

The other figures given below are the casualties recorded by divisions. In the case of the Australian divisions in the Fifth Army these do not include the fighting prior to the Arras offensive, and in that of the First Army they do not include any casualties sustained outside the battle zone. They also, as stated, include a proportion of temporary absentees. The total of the divisional diaries, 139,876, accords very well with that of the Adjutant-General, which latter, of course, includes the losses of corps and Army troops; but, as has been stated, both are certainly to some extent in excess of the number of casualties actually suffered.

The German casualties in the Arras offensive cannot easily be determined. The German Historical Service states that the casualties of the *Sixth Army* for the months of April and May were 79,418. This Army was holding the sector from "just north-west of Lens to east of Quéant", so that this figure includes none of the German casualties incurred opposite the British Fifth Army south of Quéant — 2,813 on the 15th April alone. The figure given by Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria is 85,000, again for the *Sixth Army* only. Of the 79,418 casualties it is stated that 22,792 represented the missing. This total is very difficult to reconcile with that of the British captures. It is a commonplace that in fighting of this nature the number of missing always largely exceeds the number of prisoners captured by the enemy, especially in an Army which is being driven back, yet during April and May the British captured over 20,000 prisoners. The Germans acknowledge 482 officers as missing; the

British claim to have captured 430.¹ And the British figures are the Adjutant-General's, which may be regarded as completely reliable, because they are taken, not from reports by fighting formations, but from the Provost-Marshall's receipts for prisoners handed over and from the returns of the casualty clearing stations.

In other respects the German figures are not comparable to the British, because the returns made by units in the field excluded not only the "wounded, at duty", but also those lightly wounded who were not removed from the corps areas. For these categories about 30 per cent must be added to the German total for the purpose of comparison with that of the British. (See "1916" Vol. I., p. 497.)

There is, however, reason to suppose that the German casualties in the Arras offensive up to the end of May were lighter by comparison with those of the British than in most of the British offensives. The tactical dispositions adopted by the Germans after the first few days did not expose their troops to the same degree as on the Somme in 1916. Again, after its favourable beginning, certainly after the 24th April, the Arras offensive never enjoyed any considerable success. The Battle of Arleux was in general a failure; the last major attack on the 3rd May, known as the Third Battle of the Scarpe, was nothing less than a disaster; the First Attack on Bullecourt was, on its small scale, equally calamitous; and the conditions of the Battle of Bullecourt were such that the losses of the attack were bound to be heavier than those of the defence, because the German artillery could confidently concentrate fire on a few yards of trench, whereas the situation of the main German forces was unknown to the British. Leaving these four engagements out of account, the British and German losses were probably fairly equal.

One interesting point arises regarding the casualties of the year 1917. As the Adjutant-General gave 104,862 for the whole Expeditionary Force in the month of April, it was somewhat startling to find that in an official statistical compilation entitled "Military Effort of the British Empire" the British casualties on the Western Front for this month were given as 120,070, especially as the casualty lists from this report have been given a world-wide circulation owing to the fact that they have been published in Mr. Winston Churchill's "World Crisis".

It had long been known that they were not completely reliable, but a comparison with those published in the official medical history revealed that for the year 1917 they were almost fantastically incorrect. The "Military Effort" total for the year is 817,790, that of the medical history 750,249, a difference of 67,541.² It may therefore be taken that not only the Arras casualties, but also those

¹ A small allowance should perhaps be made for cadets (*Offizierstellvertreter*), who were not counted as officers by the Germans, but succeeded in persuading their accommodating captors to treat them as officers and extend to them the privileges of officer prisoners of war.

² "Medical Services: Casualties and Medical Statistics of the Great War", p. 158. The figures published in this compilation may be taken to be as nearly correct as possible. Had they been compiled by months instead of by years, they would have been even more valuable than they are at present. They include every "casualty", even if the man only entered a dressing station for a few minutes to have treatment for the slightest scratch or abrasion.

of Messines, "Passchendaele", and Cambrai, are considerably exaggerated by the "Military Effort".

THE ADJUTANT-GENERAL'S RETURN OF CASUALTIES

		Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total
Third Army, April					
	Officers . .	682	1,968	227	2,877
	Other Ranks .	9,120	37,001	3,099	49,220
" " May					
	Officers . .	326	928	260	1,514
	Other Ranks .	5,608	21,010	6,997	33,615
	Total . .	15,786	60,907	10,583	87,226
First Army, April					
	Officers . .	364	930	147	1,441
	Other Ranks .	5,205	18,204	2,785	26,194
" " May					
	Officers . .	188	555	117	860
	Other Ranks .	2,805	12,797	2,729	18,331
	Total . .	8,562	32,486	5,778	46,826
Fifth Army, April					
	Officers . .	155	270	70	495
	Other Ranks .	2,719	5,147	2,379	10,245
" " May					
	Officers . .	143	454	56	653
	Other Ranks .	2,190	9,015	2,010	13,215
		5,207	14,886	4,515	24,608
Third, First and Fifth Armies					
	Total . .	29,505	108,279	20,876	158,660

CASUALTIES

559

CASUALTIES IN THE BATTLES OF ARRAS 1917
(Taken from Divisional War Diaries)

APRIL

	Officers			Other Ranks			Total
	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Killed	Wounded	Missing	
Third Army							
Divisions—							
3rd (9th–14th)	81	102	2	390	1,717	525	3,438
(25th–30th)	9	13	..	117	449	83	
4th	30	89	10	442	2,059	370	
9th (9th–16th)	82	145	2	525	2,592	198	3,494
12th	32	87	25	440	1,748	563	2,895
14th (9th–14th)	26	63	1	280	1,199	228	1,797
(26th–30th)							106
15th	80	203	10	887	4,410	723	6,313
17th	33	74	21	340	1,665	590	2,723
18th	1	3	..	3	46	..	53
21st	13	71	5	295	1,173	292	1,849
29th (9th–21st)	16	58	19	225	1,010	834	4,391
(22nd–30th)	29	64	11	264	1,540	321	
30th	41	108	17	502	2,124	771	
33rd (12th–27th)	32	72	14	397	1,396	823	2,734
34th	61	142	40	523	3,205	1,516	5,487
37th	58	220	14	740	4,174	1,080	6,286
50th (9th–25th)	28	83	12	464	1,518	643	2,748
51st	66	140	8	823	2,972	582	4,596
56th (5th–22nd) ¹	21	84	3	370	1,562	342	2,382
1st Cav.	..	9	..	18	77	..	104
2nd Cav. (9th–12th)	1	11	..	15	144	3	174
3rd Cav. (5th–13th)	3	38	..	83	457	47	628
							58,761
First Army							
2nd	39	72	28	349	1,504	1,089	3,081
5th (9th–24th)	22	50	6	299	1,420	286	2,083
(infy. only)							
24th	27	45	1	272	878	41	1,264
46th (139th Bde attack on 23rd)	..	5	4	62	138	114	323
63rd	41	111	18	471	2,181	972	3,794
1st Cdn.	55	142	9	705	2,441	558	3,910
2nd „	37	101	1	558	2,151	196	3,044
3rd „	30	87	5	490	1,912	417	2,941
4th „	58	125	8	960	2,496	531	4,173
							24,618
Total :							
Third Army			58,761				
First Army			24,618				
			83,379				

¹ See also list for May 1917.

MAY

	Officers			Other Ranks			Total
	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Killed	Wounded	Missing	
Third Army							
Divisions—							
3rd	21	67	18	271	1,380	193	1,950
4th	18	101	47	336	1,765	1,037	3,304
9th (28/4–11/5)	13	52	23	161	1,160	459	1,868
12th (battle cas.)	8	36	25	220	884	617	1,790
14th (est. 3rd May)	..	..	..	..	..	..	1,485
15th	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
17th	15	68	5	253	1,245	169	1,755
18th	28	70	21	283	1,345	604	2,351
21st (1st–15th)	10	50	8	101	752	396	1,317
29th	23	49	14	235	996	273	1,590
30th	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
33rd	..	..	..	..	..	..	1,928
34th	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
37th (no figures available)	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
50th	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
51st	20	53	6	315	1,269	118	1,781
56th (29/4–22/5)	25	42	13	348	1,430	250	2,108
							23,227
First Army ¹							
2nd	..	4	..	34	168	3	209
5th	24	72	22	325	1,588	791	2,822
31st	17	78	39	341	1,666	1,070	3,211
24th	1	11	..	40	178	4	234
63rd	1	22	..	79	384	4	490
1st Cdn.	15	55	1	444	1,543	253	2,311
2nd „	29	80	4	458	1,777	265	2,613
3rd „	1	21	1	77	482	6	588
4th „	18	50	1	233	1,104	35	1,441
Total :							13,919
Third Army			23,227				
First Army			13,919				
			37,146				

¹ The Canadian figures are, like the rest, from the war diaries. There is another set of figures compiled from individual documents by the Canadian Record Office and based on the final disposal of the casualty. In this the heading "missing" disappears and the numbers formerly coming under it are distributed under "killed", "wounded", "prisoners of war", etc. There is considerable difference in detail between the two sets of figures, but the totals for the two months vary little. That of the war diaries, given above, is 21,026, that of the Record Office, 20,787, a difference of 239.

**CASUALTIES IN THE BULLECOURT OPERATIONS,
APRIL-MAY 1917**

(Taken from V. Corps Q Diaries)

	Officers			Other Ranks			Total
	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Killed	Wounded	Missing	
Fifth Army Divisions							
7th : May	34	88	12	368	1,708	512	2,722
58th : May	16	62	7	321	1,304	228	1,938
62nd : April	10	36	..	157	552	19	774
May	25	88	32	262	1,731	1,321	3,459

AUSTRALIAN, 1ST AND 2ND BULLECOURT

(Taken from Aus. O.A.)

1st Aus. Div.	80 Officers	2,261 Other Ranks	2,341
2nd Aus. Div.	173 "	3,725 "	3,898
4th Aus. Div.	105 "	2,862 "	2,967
5th Aus. Div.	89 "	1,204 "	1,243

19,342

Total :

Third, First and Fifth Army Divs.,

April and May 1917 . . . 139,867

SKELETON ORDER OF BATTLE OF BRITISH TROOPS ENGAGED IN THE BATTLES OF ARRAS

9TH APRIL—30TH MAY 1917 ¹

- 2nd Division (Major-General C. E. Pereira) :
5, 6, 99 Brigades.
- 3rd Division (Major-General C. J. Deverell) :
8, 9, 76 Brigades.
- 4th Division (Major-General Hon. W. Lambton) :
10, 11, 12 Brigades.
- 5th Division (Major-General R. B. Stephens) :
13, 15, 95 Brigades.
- 9th (Scottish) Division (Major-General H. T. Lukin) :
26, 27, South African Brigades.
- 12th (Eastern) Division (Major-General A. B. Scott) :
35, 36, 37 Brigades.
- 14th (Light) Division (Major-General V. A. Couper) :
41, 42, 43 Brigades.
- 15th (Scottish) Division (Major-General F. W. N. McCracken) :
44, 45, 46 Brigades.
- 17th (Northern) Division (Major-General P. R. Robertson) :
50, 51, 52 Brigades.
- 18th (Eastern) Division (Major-General R. P. Lee) :
53, 54, 55 Brigades.
- 21st Division (Major-General D. G. M. Campbell) :
62, 64, 110 Brigades.
- 24th Division (Major-General J. E. Capper) :
17, 72, 73 Brigades.
- 29th Division (Major-General Sir H. de B. de Lisle) :
86, 87, 88 Brigades.
- 30th Division (Major-General J. S. M. Shea) :
21, 89, 90 Brigades.
- 31st Division (Major-General R. Wanless O'Gowan) :
92, 93, 94 Brigades.
- 33rd Division (Major-General R. J. Pinney) :
19, 98, 100 Brigades.
- 34th Division (Major-General C. L. Nicholson) :
101, 102, 103 Brigades.
- 37th Division (Major-General H. Bruce Williams) :
63, 111, 112 Brigades.

¹ "Flanking Operations round Bullecourt" come under a separate heading, which follows.

- 50th (Northumbrian) Division (Major-General P. S. Wilkinson) :
149, 150, 151 Brigades.
- 51st (Highland) Division (Major-General G. M. Harper) :
152, 153, 154 Brigades.
- 56th (1st London) Division (Major-General C. P. A. Hull) :
167, 168, 169 Brigades.
- 63rd (Royal Naval) Division (Major-General C. E. Lawrie) :
188, 189, 190 Brigades.
- 1st Canadian Division (Major-General A. W. Currie) :
1, 2, 3 Canadian Brigades.
- 2nd Canadian Division (Major-General H. E. Burstall) :
4, 5, 6 Canadian Brigades.
- 3rd Canadian Division (Major-General L. J. Lipsett) :
7, 8, 9 Canadian Brigades.
- 4th Canadian Division (Major-General D. Watson) :
10, 11, 12 Canadian Brigades.
- 1st Cavalry Division (Major-General R. L. Mullens) :
1, 2, 9 Cavalry Brigades.
- 2nd Cavalry Division (Major-General W. H. Greenly) :
3, 4, 5 Cavalry Brigades.
- 3rd Cavalry Division (Major-General J. Vaughan) :
6, 7, 8 Cavalry Brigades.

FLANKING OPERATIONS ROUND BULLECOURT

11TH APRIL—30TH MAY 1917

- 7th Division (Major-General T. H. Shoubridge) :
20, 22, 91 Brigades.
- 58th (2nd/1st London) Division (Major-General H. D. Fanshawe) :
173, 174, 175 Brigades.
- 62nd (2nd West Riding) Division (Major-General W. P. Braithwaite) :
185, 186, 187 Brigades.
- 1st Australian Division (Major-General H. B. Walker) :
1, 2, 3 Australian Brigades.
- 2nd Australian Division (Major-General N. M. Smyth) :
5, 6, 7 Australian Brigades.
- 4th Australian Division (Major-General W. Holmes) :
4, 12, 18 Australian Brigades.
- 5th Australian Division (Major-General J. J. T. Hobbs) :
8, 14, 15 Australian Brigades.
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